

**My experience at the University of Wyoming as an exchange student.
Period of stay: Academic year 2016/1027**

My name is Samuel Vorbrugg and I study Geotechnical Engineering at the University of Applied Sciences Nordhausen. During my studies I decided to study abroad at the University of Wyoming, USA in my fifth and sixth semester.

My decision to study abroad was pretty clear to me before I even started studying, simply because it was one of my requirements to start studying. I was once in the US before and travelled down the east coast for two months. I really enjoyed it, but I had never been before to the Cowboy State: Wyoming. Wyoming is the least populated state in the US with approximately 500.000 inhabitants and 1/3 bigger than Germany.

Wyoming has a lot of nature and wild animals, making it ideal for nature loving people. The landscape is amazing and it's a must especially for people who like the outdoors. Wyoming is perfect for hiking, camping, backcountry and lots of other fun outdoor stuff. It is very harsh in the wintertime with freezing temperatures and winds, as well as blizzards leading to highways closing down around Laramie. However, it can be also very nice and warm during summertime, the beginning of fall and the end of spring. The summers in Wyoming are beautiful. But be prepared for abrupt changes in weather. It can switch from nice and warm to windy and cold overnight. It was not a problem to find classes that give the needed credits. In the American system classes are categorized by different levels. These levels range from 1.000 to 4.000 and sometimes need pre-requirements which means you have to bring proof that you have attended a lower leveled class or an equivalent class in Germany. I would recommend talking to the International Office in Wyoming. But anyway as an international it is much easier to get enrolled in classes because as an international nobody has required classes in the US. Just ask the Prof. or the Department for an override and it should be possible to enroll than. They need the hint that an international student is asking for the override at any time.

For my fifth semester I chose the following classes:

GEOG 2150: Foundations GIS and Tech.
CE3200: Structural Analysis.
CE3600: Soil Mechanics.
CE4350 Design of Hydro Energy Systems.

For my sixth semester I chose the following classes:

ATSC2100: Global Warming: The Science.
GEOL2100: Stratigraphy and Sediment:
GEOL3600: Geological Hazards.
CE4620: Soil and Rock Slope.
CE4630: Geotechnical Engineering.

Four classes are doable without bigger problems. Many people will tell you to do not more than four classes there. However, five classes like I did it in the sixth semester is also no big deal. Especially in the second half of the academic year. At this point people are more experienced in English and therefore it is easier to take five classes. Four classes are still the optimum during the first semester there. It is necessary to get used to assignments, quizzes and midterms in a foreign language.

Doing the required paperwork to study abroad wasn't that difficult as well as applying for the Visa. It is still time consuming and you should plan ahead to have enough time to everything correct. The paperwork itself doesn't take that long but sending the documents for UW and Visa-Documents back and forward takes some time. Therefore, do our work ahead of time and not "close to closure".

I chose to live in the quite pricy dorms which are combined with a meal plan at the Washakie Dining Center. I had mixed feelings about the dorms, mainly because the most people that live there are 18 years old and you are dependent on the cafeteria. At the end I chose to stay in Hill Hall which won't be open next semester because of closure. Hill Hall was the only dorm with single rooms, fridge, microwave and alcohol was allowed. However it was more expensive than the other dorms. When I extended my stay for another semester, I planned to move out of the dorms into a shared flat, but the residence life administration would not let me move off campus, because all dorm contracts are for one academic (2 Semester). The only way to break the contract is leaving Laramie after one semester. Obviously there is the argument that you meet quickly people there, but in the end I mainly hung out with people I met in my classes or team mates from the sports team I joined. Other things that you might want to consider are that you are not allowed to have alcohol on campus with the exception of Hill Hall which offers more pricy single rooms. Bathrooms in the dorms are always shared but separated in genders. If you want to save money and be more independent, living off-campus would be the better option. The campus is nice and there are a lot of activities offered, a big gym with multiple basketball courts, climbing wall, pool and everything is for free. Several Movie nights, shows and the little bar downstairs in the Union are also quite nice. However, people usually go to mingles on Thursday. That's the place where folks hang out on Thursday night before heading downtown.

University in the US is a mixture of school and German university. Most classes have an attendance policy and you will have to do graded quizzes and assignments. There are several exams during the semester and one cumulative final for each subject at the end of the semester. In higher division classes it is more common to work on projects, write papers and whole presentations. In my free time I played Ultimate Frisbee in a team there, watched the football games during the season in fall, played basketball and climbed. Furthermore, I went hiking/mountaineering and climbing in the quite close Snowy Range, Medicine bow or Vedauwoo. Snow range ski area, Steamboat, Winter-park and A-Basin are nice and relatively close ski areas. Americans are really interesting and the people have a higher value of individuality and therefore you will find all types of people. The majority of people in the state tend to be republican, but in the university town of Laramie you will still find a lot of people that are more liberal and democratic oriented. All the people I met were really friendly and open to talk to and I made some really good friends during my stay. What I thought was quite useful is to make quickly friends with people that own a car, since getting around especially out of Laramie is otherwise nearly impossible. There is a tiny bus system in Laramie and so-called Saferide taxis which are for free and quite useful when it comes to going out at night. Saferide is just available on Thursday-Frida after 9pm usually.

Another option is to buy a used car and resell it at the end of the stay. A car is really vital in the US. All in all I can recommend the University of Wyoming to anyone who likes the US and wants to see a different more wild side of the Land of the free. I highly advise people to also visit different states, since the culture and mentality differs from state to state.

Road-trips with friends during weekends and short breaks are the best option next to the 30 days before and after the visa dates. If you stay over the winter break for the Fall-Semester use your time there. It is the most perfect time to visit the southern States. Several National Parks or Monuments are “close” to Laramie and perfect for a week trip over Spring Break or Thanksgiving. There are also some nice towns in Colorado to do some weekend trips. Especially Boulder and Fort Collins should be on the list.