

One Amazing, Exciting, and Extremely Interesting Exchange Semester at Pacific University

After getting approved to spend an exchange semester at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon, I could not wait to finally make my dream of experiencing the United States in person come true. Fortunately, time passed by very quickly and there I was, standing at the airport of Los Angeles.

I started my stay in America with a round-trip through California and a two-week language course in San Francisco. During these first four weeks I got a great insight into California's culture and also got the chance to talk a lot in English. Though one might think that you cannot learn a lot of a language in only two weeks, this course was very helpful. Not only did I learn important slang words and phrases that are commonly used in America, but also important grammar rules.

With this new knowledge I felt very well prepared to start studying at Pacific University. On 23 August, 2009, I arrived in Portland where a couple of very nice students, accompanied by our international student advisor, Megan Serenco, picked me up and brought me to Forest Grove. During International Student Orientation, Megan Serenco, Stephan Prag, other University staff, and a lot of very nice and motivated students helped me to feel very welcome at Pacific. In this first week I did not only get to know important information about the campus and my classes, but also was I able to establish friendships with people from all over the world.

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On 31 August, 2009, school finally started and I was faced with plenty of unfamiliar things, behaviors, and habits.

At Pacific the relationships between students and teachers is completely different than at the AAU. Students can address their teachers with their first name and talking to them often feels like talking to a friend. The obligation to actively participate in classes and the really small class sizes (max. 25 students per class) facilitated feeling comfortable with asking questions and talking without the fear of making mistakes.

I took Business Communications, Organizational Behavior, and Digital Imaging. I enjoyed all three classes and learned a lot throughout the semester. The way of teaching at Pacific is very related to practice and we had to do a lot of group projects, which I really enjoyed. Nevertheless, I have to admit that studying at Pacific is very time-consuming. Though I “only” took three classes, the workload was overwhelming. Weekly assignments, readings, papers, midterms, exams; there was always something to do for school and missing a class would have meant losing significant parts of the final grade.

Yet, I mostly enjoyed doing the homework because it was interesting and necessary to be able to participate in class. Being prepared also contributed to my interest in the class content and made it easier to understand and follow the teacher.

Concerning housing, Pacific University is very well organized. There are different possibilities to live on campus. For international students Pacific offers free accommodation in Vandervelden. Vandervelden is a row-housing complex with three four-person apartments in each house. I lived together with two great girls from Hawaii and one from Portland. All other international students were my direct neighbors, which was very convenient.

Each apartment has four single rooms, two bathrooms and a big kitchen with living room. As we were all living very close to each other we often cooked for each other or together. With so many neighbors I never felt lonely or bored and really enjoyed my free time and made the most of it.

It was always easy to find someone to go on a shopping tour or to travel around when school allowed it. We spent some days in Seattle, Vancouver, Las Vegas, and experienced Portland's culture, day- and night-life ;-). When there was not enough time to go on a trip, we went for a walk, bowling, to Cantina, or had dinner together.

Another great thing about living on campus in Forest Grove is that Vandervelden is situated directly next to Pacific's Athletic and Aquatic Center which are free to use for Pacific students. The PAC was another leisure-time facility that we made use of when the teachers did not give enough homework to consume all our free time :-D.

All in all, I have to say that an exchange semester is a unique chance to gain life-experiences that you cannot attain in any other way. It improves not only your cultural literacy and language skills, but it also allows you to make friends with people from all over the world, explore plenty of interesting places far from home, and helps you to broaden your mind, become more independent, and discover abilities and characteristics you did not know you have. So, if you ever took into thought to do an exchange semester, do not argue about it anymore; just do it! I am sure you will find it at least as amazing as I do.