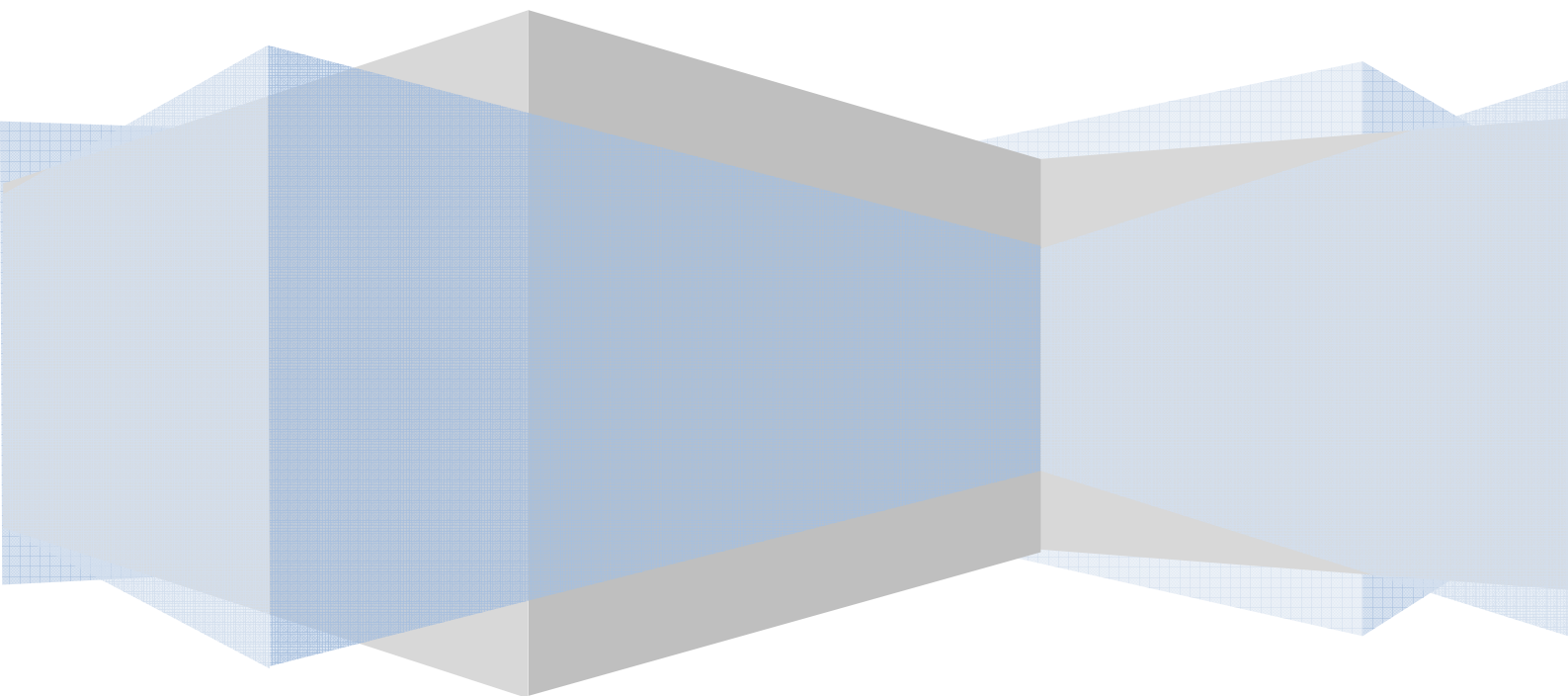




Final Report

Exchange Semester at Washburn University
(Fall Semester 2009)

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INTRODUCTION

“Kansas City, Kansas” was my first thought when I got the notification that I could study at Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas. Honestly, Washburn University was not my first choice but as I truly wanted to go to the USA for one semester I took this opportunity and decided to go to Kansas. One reason why I wanted to leave was to improve my English skills. Further, studying abroad indicates that the person is flexible and cosmopolitan which is, in my opinion, rather important for one’s future career. Moreover, I also wanted to get to know the American culture and I also wanted to visit different places which I had only known from TV.

In the middle of August the fall semester at Washburn University started and ended in the middle of December. I spent 4 months in Topeka. This report aims to give an insight into the student life at Washburn University. It is divided into different sections which include important facts about living and studying at Washburn University and personal experiences and opinions.

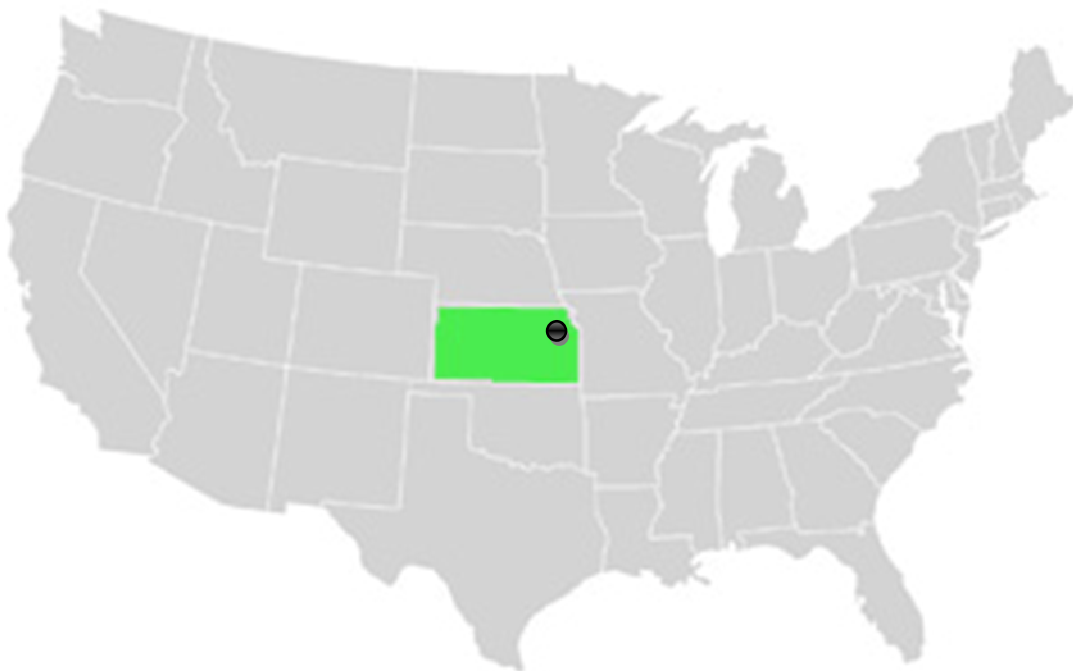


Kansas and Topeka

Kansas is a state located in the Midwestern United States. It is bordered by Nebraska on the north, Missouri on the east, Oklahoma on the south and Colorado on the west. The state has an estimated population about 2,700,000. Kansas is a relatively flat country. There are no mountains as we know them from Carinthia.

Topeka is the capital city of Kansas. It is situated along the Kansas River, located in the northeast of Kansas. The city has an estimated population about 120,000. Topeka offers its inhabitants everything they need. There are grocery stores, bars, restaurants, a shopping mall and a lot of other shops. Topeka does not have a city center as we know it from Austrian cities. The city is relatively widespread.

Public Transportation in Kansas is nonexistent. There are neither buses nor trains to get to other cities easily. In Topeka, there is only one bus line. As most of the exchange students do not have an own car, they can use the bus to get to the shopping mall and to Wal-Mart for shopping. The bus stop is in front of Washburn University and goes directly to Wal-Mart and the shopping mall. If one wants to visit to other cities in Kansas, like Lawrence or Manhattan, the best idea is to rent a car or to go with friends who have a car.



Washburn University: campus and facilities

Washburn University is a public institution of higher learning located in Topeka. The university has approximately 550 faculty members who teach 7,300 students. The campus of Washburn University amazed me when I first came there in the middle of August. It is rather huge and neat. On the campus there are approximately 10 buildings where all classes are held and where the administration is located. Further, one can find the library, a bookstore and a small post office on campus too. Moreover, there is also a huge football stadium, a baseball field, tennis courts, a soccer field, a modern gym, an indoor swimming pool and a concert hall. Washburn students can use all these facilities and venues for free.

Concerning accommodation Washburn Students have two possibilities when living on campus. Either they live in the dormitories where a single or double room, a shared bathroom with 2 or 3 other students and a shared kitchen on the floor is provided, or they live in the Washburn Village where apartments of 4 with kitchen, living room and 2 bathrooms can be found. Both, in the dormitories and in the Village, one can find washing machines and dryers. Further, there are pool tables and ping pong tables, TVs and computer rooms which can be used for free. On the whole campus wireless internet is available for students.

I lived in the dormitories and shared my room with another student from our university. We had to share our bathroom with 2 nice American girls. First, I thought this would be problematic but in fact we did not have any problems at all. The room was o.k., however, we had to buy certain stuff, such as, bedside lamps, clothing hangers and cleaning stuff. Further, I also have to mention that the kitchen is not equipped. Every student has to bring his/her own kitchen equipment which was rather annoying for me because I we also had to buy certain stuff for the kitchen.

Every student who lives on Campus is obliged to take a meal plan. This meal plan consists of a certain amount of money which can be used to buy food in the cafeteria or in the Corner Store, which is a combination of a coffee shop and a grocery store. Before I came to Washburn University I was worrying about the American food, however, the worries were entirely to no purpose. The cafeteria has a rather good offer for Washburn students. It is like a food court. One can choose among the fast food corner, the sandwich corner, the pizza corner, the Chinese corner and the salad bar. I never had problems to find something and the food is quite good. However, it is rather expensive for a university cafeteria. The Corner Store has a good offer too. It includes beverages, sandwiches, ready-to-eat meals, ice cream, sweets cereals and a lot more. In the Corner Store a Starbucks Coffee shop can be found. They sell all the delicious coffee products like every normal Starbucks Coffee shop

Classes at Washburn University

Classes at Washburn University are rather different than ours. First of all, classes are either 2 times a week or 3 times. During the semester a lot of homework is to do. Further, there are also unannounced quizzes, a midterm exam and a final exam. Depending on the class, there is also a research paper to write and present or a case study to work on and present. Attendance is also compulsory. The advantage of this modus is that the grade does not only consist of the final exam. It consists of all assignments, quizzes, final exam and the grade of the research paper or case study. This modus forces the students to study constantly during the semester and not only at the end of the semester for the final exam. However, I have to admit that I really had to adjust myself to this modus. During the first two weeks I was a little bit desperate because it was so much homework to do and I was not used to do it anymore. Finally, I developed a certain rhythm and everything worked out pretty well. There was also some free time left to have good times in Topeka. As there is rather much to do for one class American students only take 4, at most, 5 classes during a semester. I took only 4 classes. All in all, I have to say that classes at Washburn University remind me more of high school.

The professors at Washburn University are all very competent and helpful. They are all rather respectful and they are also regardful of exchange students. If there are any questions or other requests concerning the class, every student can talk to the professor anytime. The relationship between professors and students at Washburn University is quite personal. I really appreciated this fact.

Social Life at Washburn University

From the very beginning, when were picked up at the airport in Kansas City from faculty members who were responsible for the international students, I was impressed by their friendliness and helpfulness. I have never met people before who were that welcoming. I thought that only the people from the “i-House”, which is the administration, responsible for the incoming and outgoing students at Washburn University, were like that, however, nearly every person I have met in Topeka was that welcoming, friendly and helpful.

At Washburn University there is no weekend where no activity takes place. For students who are fans of sports there are football games, soccer games, volleyball games, basketball games, baseball games and tennis games. I really recommend every student to go to at least one sports event to enjoy the unforgettable flair. Although, I am not a big fan of passive sport I was impressed by these events. There are hundreds of students who support their teams and cheer for them. It is just breathtaking.

Further, there are numerous students clubs and organizations where students can become active members. I bet that everyone who studies at Washburn University can find a club or organization in which he or she is interested. The clubs host events and do activities in their fields. Moreover, there are also several fraternities and sororities on campus. They also organize a lot of events and activities where students can participate in. Washburn University is just a small university but they have so many clubs which represent diversity and multiculturalism. Moreover, the University invites numerous guest speakers during the semester. There is at least one speaker a month. These events can be visited for free.

One event which is rather important for students at Washburn University is the homecoming week which is in October after the break. During the week there are several competitions, such as, a dance competition among sororities and fraternities as well as among faculty departments. These competitions are taken very serious because the winner gets honored. Further, there is also a big homecoming parade with numerous floats decorated by the different clubs, organizations, sororities and fraternities on the weekend, followed by a football game where the homecoming queen and king are announced. Further, there is also a homecoming ball where all students are dressed up. It was really interesting and great fun to participate in the different events.

International students at Washburn University also have the possibility to sign up for the “Topeka Friendship Network” where students get assigned a family from Topeka. The family then shows the students the typical American way of life including family days, such as, Thanks Giving. I also participated in this network and I was really happy that I did it. I had a really nice family who

invited me to their family nights where we had dinner, watched TV and played cards. They also took me to concerts and other events. I got an insight into the typical American family life.

Concerning international students, it can be said that there are not that many students who are at Washburn for just one semester. Most of the international students are degree seeking students or stay at least for one year. Most of them are from the Americas and from China. There were only approx. 13 students (5 Germans, 5 French, 1 Paraguayan and 2 Austrians) who stayed for one semester. Further, the Germans, French and we, the Austrians, were the only students from Europe. Honestly, I expected more international students. Therefore, I was a little bit disappointed when I realized that there are no more students coming.

Due to these numerous events and activities I became part of the typical American college life. No student can get bored at Washburn University because of these numerous events and activities. Further, these events offer a great opportunity to meet new people. I have never met so many people in such a short time. Making friends was rather easy and they were all very helpful and nice. As I had no car, my friends gave me a ride when I need one; they invited me to their homes and to parties. I had never the feeling of being alone in Topeka and this was really great. However, I have to admit that the friendships have not been that deep. In my opinion Americans tend to be superficial.

Kansas City & Co

As Topeka is not a very exciting city – there is not much to visit – I really recommend visiting other places. There are at least 3 nice cities which one should visit when staying in Topeka. Kansas City, for example, is a really nice city to go for a weekend trip or for a daytrip. It only takes 2 hours to go there by car. During the day one can go shopping. The shopping possibilities in Kansas City are much better than in Topeka. One can also visit the most important sights. Afterwards the “Power and Light District” is the ideal opportunity to have a fun night. It consists of several bars which are located in one building. In the middle of the building there is some kind of courtyard with a stage where bands perform live. However, one only gets into the District with a valid passport and one has to be at least 21.

Another visit worth is Lawrence. Lawrence is rather small but very neat. From Topeka it only takes 25 minutes to go there by car. The reason why one should go to Lawrence is the fact that this city is a typical student city because the “University of Kansas” is located there with approx. 20,000 Students. As a result, a lot of independent shops, bars and restaurants can be found. On the street

there is always movement because of the high number of students living there. The nightlife there is also very fun.

Also Manhattan – no not Manhattan New York, it is Manhattan Kansas – is a typical student city due to the fact that the Kansas State University is located there. This university is even bigger and has more students than the University of Kansas. There are also a lot of independent shops, bars and restaurants. By car it takes approx. 1.5 hours to get there. I have been to all of these cities during my stay and I had a lot of fun there. I really recommend going to these place if there is the possibility because it is a welcoming change to Topeka. The best day to go to these places is when both universities play each other in football. This is a major event. On this day thousands of people are on the streets and in the bars to watch the game. The flair on this day is just awesome. I will never forget this day.

All in all, it can be said that although Kansas does not seem the most exciting place to stay for one's exchange semester, it offers a certain variety. It was not that bad, as I thought it would be. I was very surprised.

Expenses

The following table presents my major expenses for the semester at Washburn University

Purpose	Amount in EUR
Visa	147.-
Photos for Visa	16.-
Department for Homeland Security	144.-
Health Insurance	365.-
Flight (Vienna – Kansas City)	1120.-
Housing at Washburn University	1942.-
Books	250.-
Monthly Expenses	1200.- (300.- per month)
TOTAL	5184.-

Personal reflection

Although Washburn University was not my first choice, I am really glad that I could spend the last semester there. I met a lot of new people and I made new friends. I also established other useful international relationships for my future life. I got to know the American culture and saw a lot of new places. I improved both my English writing and speaking skills. Moreover, I also learned how to live on my own and I have become more flexible and independent. I truly can say that the last 5 months were the most exciting ones in my life. Although, it was the first time for me to leave home for such a long time, which was not long at all because it went by quickly, I had no problems at all. During the 5 months, I never felt homesick which indicates that I was too busy to get homesick. I really had an amazing time at Washburn University. I recommend every student to spend a semester abroad. It does not matter where one is going; the main point is to go. It is a lifelong unforgettable experience.

I also want to mention that Washburn University takes really good care of the international students. Especially Heidi Staerkel, my coordinator, is doing a really good job. I have never met such a motivated and committed faculty member before. If someone had any troubles Heidi always tried to help and solve them immediately. It was good to know that there where people one can really trust in case of problems. I have to say it once again but for me Washburn University was a great place to spend my semester.