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The following document includes a review of my study abroad experience at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). The objective is not only to give information, but also to present my personal journey of the past year and a half. In addition, I want to offer some advice on common struggles and problems.

Studying abroad- the world opens up and changes you

Short portrait of myself before studying abroad

I was an applied business administration major, who was born and who lived in Vienna for more than 20 years. The only international experiences that I had up to that point were vacations within Europe as well as a study trip to China. Triggered by my studies, I moved to Klagenfurt two years ago. There I had the valuable opportunity to meet and live with students from around the globe. Interacting and getting to know those people opened my eyes and broadened my scope of the world a little. I recognized differences that I had not known before and that I could not explain. Perspectives on topics, behaviors in situation, understandings and cultural patterns differed so much and demonstrated an –for me– unknown diversity. Therefore my curiosity for the unknown as well as my international friendships caused me to apply for the Joint Study Program of the University Klagenfurt.

Application- Nomination- Preparation

The application process does not consist of any challenge. All you need is a cover letter with the desired study abroad university, a resume and a specific number of class credits are needed to be considered for the following selection process. If you are selected you will be nominated by the University Klagenfurt and UNCG. The following preparation process requires the most effort before you can leave. Do not worry, the International Program Center (IPC) of UNCG is extremely well organized and gives students a warm welcome even before arriving. You will get a ‘welcome package’ from UNCG containing main forms and guidelines for your health documentation, visa papers, meal plan, housing sign ups, etc. In



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addition you will have to prepare different forms for the University Klagenfurt, financial aid documents, visa appointments, class sign ups, etc. Also, talk to your instructors and get their conformation that you will receive credits for the classes you are going to attend.

My advice is to START AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE to avoid getting pressed for time. Further, try to get in touch with students who studied abroad at the UNCG in recent semesters and get their knowledge. Also, meet up with students, who will go abroad at the same time. It will help to talk to people who are going through the same process that you are. Also, if you have the opportunity to travel before studying at UNCG- take it! Try to see the country, meet people and feel the diversity- it will be helpful for a smooth transition.

When communicating with the staff at UNCG, don not be shy. Email your questions and concerns to the IPC. They are supportive in any situation and will comfort you in possible doubts. As housing signs up I highly recommend 'Philip- Hawkins Residents Hall'. This is where most international students live mixed with American students. For the meal plan I would choose a mixture of Caf-meals and DB (Declining Balance) such as 'Silver 500' in order to eat at different locations. Further, classes are really intensive; therefore do not take more than five classes.

Getting to UNCG

UNCG is well prepared for your arrival and there will always be people available to answer your questions or to help with your difficulties. After your arrival, you will find yourself in an orientation program offered by the IPC for the first couple of days. You will receive all necessary and important information about the U.S., UNCG campus, classes, etc. UNCG will even take you shopping and offer events to get to know other exchange students and Americans.

I highly recommend taking every opportunity to get to know people and to take part in activities. BE OPEN- INTERACT- EXPERIENCE. Don't let your personality, first impressions or



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stereotypes hinder you too much. I personally let my caution lead me first. Since I did not know anyone I focused on my American friends from Klagenfurt instead of getting myself out there. Meeting and getting to know people from all over the world is one of the most significant events in your semester abroad. So let it happen.

Shock followed by normalization

After a couple of weeks you will realize that everything- really everything is so different than what you are used to. Of course you will expect differences when you go to another country, but you might underestimate them, especially if you study abroad in the U.S. The U.S. is present in Europe on a daily basis due to news, entertainment, movies, etc. Be prepared that even if our culture contains elements of the American life- those pieces might still be different. I want to illustrate it with Chinese food: I personally love American Chinese food; I like Austrian Chinese food; but totally dislike Chinese Chinese food- even if it is exactly the same dish.

You will see those differences everywhere: in school, friendships, interactions, entertainment, businesses, transportation, shopping, etc. You will get to a point where questions such as 'What am I doing here?' or 'Was this a good decision?' may arise. In order to progress through this phase, talking to other people is a very helpful instrument. Soon all of those weird and strange things will become more and more familiar to you and part of your life.

My advice is to be open and to remain open for this process. Try to remember that BEING DIFFERENT DOES NOT IMPLY BAD NECESSARILY, BUT THE OPPOSITE IF YOU TAKE THE CHALLENGE AND ADOPT. In the end you will have more knowledge, skills and experiences with intercultural processes that will open new dimensions for you and international connections.



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Going back home

Four months will pass quicker than you might expect and you will need to get ready to return to your home country. Saying goodbye to friends and the familiar culture and environment may give you hardship before and after you leave.

My advice is to enjoy every minute possible and DO NOT BE SAD TO GIVE IT ALL UP. BE GRATEFUL FOR THE OPPORTUNITY THAT YOU HAD! Exchange contact information and stay in touch with your friends if possible, but remember that live goes on.

In my first exchange semester I requested an extension of my study abroad time at UNCG. The University Klagenfurt granted me the extension and collaborated with UNCG to make it possible for me to study another semester abroad without paying any study fees! I cannot express in words how valuable the extension was for me and I am deeply grateful- THANK YOU SO MUCH!

Short portrait of myself after studying abroad

I am 23 years old and I have never seen the world the way I do it now. I can finally understand and feel the diversity that life has to offer. I am more open to different perspectives, behaviors, understandings, cultures, problems, etc. The world displays itself as rich, colorful and incredibly beautiful. I can hardly wait to go abroad again and gain more knowledge about myself, other people, countries and cultures.

In fact, you can go on vacation, look at pictures, see movies or listen to stories of other countries, but living there and collecting unique experiences is incomparable. IT CHANGES YOU- IN THE BEST WAY POSSIBLE!