Major/Minor: Global Studies/German minor______________________________

Country: Germany_________________________ Program: Free University Direct Exchange__________________________ Term & Year Abroad: Winter Semester 2009-2010______

Instructors
What were they like when compared to UCSB instructors?
They were more intimidating, but once I approached them they were all really nice to exchange students, especially Americans.

Could you call them by their first names?
No, you never address them by their first names. Always Herr. There is also a specific way to send an email to professors as well.

Was the student/instructor relationship more formal than at UCSB?
The student/instructor relationship was less formal than at UCSB. The professors treated the students, as almost equals, in the sense of discussion. The professors never seemed like their opinions were the only right ones.

Were they available for help during office hours?
Office hours in Germany is different than at UCSB. I usually just talked to them via email, or after class and I was fine. They would probably set up a time to talk, but it's not like UCSB office hours.

Courses
Were the courses more difficult when compared to UCSB courses?
The courses were difficult, but in a different way. The structure of the classes is different. I didn't have a lot of homework, but I had to do a lot of independent research. The language courses were more difficult than the language courses at UCSB.

Was the grading system similar to UCSB?
No, the Germans use numbers instead of letters, and are harder graders. It is really hard to get a 1, the equivalent to an A. Although, being an exchange student, I was graded pretty easily. Once again, they are really understanding of American exchange students.

How did the course structure differ? Ex) did you have many assignments or just finals?
There was not nearly as many assigned reading. For most classes you would have one presentation and either one paper or test at the end of the semester, and that was all that your grade was based upon.

Did you have oral and/or written exams?
I had written exams, but depending on the professor you can take the exam in English or ask for an oral exam.

Was the final exam schedule flexible or inflexible?
The final exam schedule was inflexible.

**What kind of academic support, if any, did you receive?**
You are pretty much on your own. I did talk to some of my professors and they helped me pick a topic to do my presentation on and my research paper on, but besides that you are expected to do a lot of independent learning.

**Did you find you needed to be more independent and take more initiative abroad?**
I needed to be way more independent abroad and definitely take more initiative.

**Was classroom participation expected?**
Classroom participation is pretty common among German students. It depends on whether or not you are at a Vorlesung (a lecture) or a Seminar (discussion). My grades never depended on class participation.

**How were the host university courses different than UCSB courses?**
Most classes only met once a week for 2 hours. Even though the class says it's from 5-7, it really means it's from 5:15 to 6:45. They give everyone 15 minutes to get to their next class. You do not get a lot of assigned reading, and most readings are online or in the library. There are readers but they are usually pretty small and cheap. All of the papers you write are on topics you create, and you have to research all of your own sources. Language courses are usually two times a week for 4 hours each, but you start 15 min later and end 15 min earlier and you have 30 minute break in between.

**Were classes usually on certain days/times and for how long?**
Classes are usually anytime Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm, there are occasionally Block Seminars on weekends, which last all day for a few weekends.

**What is the class culture like? How important was it to be punctual? Could you eat/drink in class?**
It is important to be punctual, I saw some students eat and drink in class, but I think it depends on the professor. At the end of class everyone knocks on the table, as a "thank you."

**Language**
**In which languages were the courses offered?**
Courses are offered in English and German.

**What language did you take your courses in?**
I took three of my classes in German (one was a language course) and I took a Hochseminar (masters section) in English.

**If you took your courses in a foreign language, please provide info about your overall experience, difficulty of courses, language acquisition, placement exams, etc.**
My overall experience was a good one. It seems like an impossible task to accomplish, but I made it through my classes with good grades. The courses were difficult, but I ended up understanding more than I ever thought I would. I did three presentations in German, which I believe went really well. The German placement exam is hard. The structure is unlike any language test I had ever taken. In order to do well on the exam, one needs to know a lot of German vocabulary, which unfortunately I didn't have.

**Host University**

How large is the university? Student enrollment and approx campus size (smaller than UCSB)? Is it an urban campus with many tall buildings or just a few building?

The university is a lot larger than UCSB. The campus consisted of many different buildings located in Dahlem. I had to figure out which bus to take to get to each separate building.

Do the local students live on campus, at home, or off campus?

Local students live off campus, usually in Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain.

If not located in the city center, How far or close is it to the city?

It usually takes around 45 minutes to an hour to get to the university from the city center.

What type of public transportation could you take – cost?

As a student at the Freie Universität, you pay for a semester ticket which is your student id, and the cost of the id includes a public transportation pass. You can use everything, buses, the s-bahn and u-bahn, all for free with your pass.

Could students take cabs -cost?

Students can take cabs, I took one from the airport to my apartment in Steglitz and it was around 20 to 30 euros. Public transportation is really good, so you don't need to take a cab unless you go out on a weekday and stay out past the time the u-bahn and s-bahn run. Buses are working throughout the night but they only come each hour or two.

How long would it take to get to the city center?

It took me about 30 minutes to get to the city center.

Are there student clubs on campus that UC students could join?

Yes, I joined the club led by Campus Crusade for Christ.

Is there a bookstore on campus? Where did you get your books?

There isn't a bookstore on campus, you get your books at numerous bookstores in Berlin. But the professors will tell you which bookstore.

Is there a computer lab on campus? Or, should students bring laptops?

Yes, there is a computer lab on campus.

What types of establishments are in the university’s neighborhood? (cafes, stores, etc)
There are cafes, and book stores, restaurants. Dahlem-Zehlendorf is more of a residential area of Berlin, so there are a lot of houses and practices.

**Housing**

**What types of accommodations are available to UC students?**
You can live in the dorms, but they aren’t located on campus, rather in the outskirts of Berlin. Most students find their own apartment in the city subleasing from someone for 3 months to 7 months to 1 year.

**How close are they to campus?**
They are anywhere from 15 minutes to campus, to 1 hr from campus.

**How did you find your housing?**
I found housing through a friend of a friend who had just been in Berlin. I stayed at Haus-Nazareth, a house for Christian students.

**Where did you live and with whom?**
I lived in Steglitz with six German students and two other American students.

**If you lived off campus, was it difficult to find an apartment and roommate?**
It was kind of difficult, but it all works out.

**Were the rooms nicer or not than I.V./UCSB dorms?**
The rooms were so much nicer. They are older, most apartments are Altbau buildings, but you will always have your own room, which will usually be bigger than your room that you share in I.V.

**Was it more expensive than living in I.V.? How much was a typical rent cost in US dollars?**
It was less expensive than living in I.V. Typical rent is around 400 dollars a month. But you can find cheaper or more expensive rooms.

**How/who did you pay for housing?**
You pay the landlord. I set up direct withdrawal, so they would take rent out automatically each month from my Deutsche Bank account.

**Food**

**What was the food like?**
The food is amazing. The bread is dark, whole grain, healthy bread. They eat a lot of sausage and lot of different types of cheese. Their desserts are amazing, they contain less sugar than our desserts but they taste better. The chocolate is cheap and so much better than Hershey’s.
Where did you eat most of your meals? Cafeterias, restaurants, street vendors, etc?
I ate most of meals at home. Eating out isn't too expensive in Berlin, but it is more expensive than eating out in the US.

How much was an average meal?
An average meal was probably around 10 Euros, so about 15 dollars.

What time of day did people eat lunch/dinner?
People eat lunch around 12, and this is the biggest meal of the day. Dinner is eaten around 7 or 8 and is a lighter meal consisting of bread and cheese.

Would it be difficult for vegetarians to find meals?
No, there are a lot of markets that sell fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as a lot of Organic Stores - Bio Laden.

Travel/Safety
Did you feel safe in your host city? Are there tips you would offer future students?
Yes, I did a lot on my own during my time studying abroad. The only times I didn't feel safe was when I was in Neukölln at night. Don't go to Lichtenberg, because of neonazis. There are usually people on the streets at all hours during the weekend, so just always walk on a street where many people are on.

Describe the public transportation in your host country?
The public transportation is really good in Berlin. You can use the bvg website to find out what bus or u-bahn or s-bahn you need to take to get anywhere, and when to catch it. When I was there, they were doing work on a lot of u-bahn and s-bahn trains, so sometimes I couldn't go to certain stations, but it was still relatively easy to get anywhere.

Was it difficult/easy to travel to neighboring countries?
It is pretty easy traveling to neighboring countries. In Germany they have this thing called, Mitfahrgelegenheit, http://www.mitfahrgelegenheit.de/. I travelled to Prague using Mitfahrgelegenheit. People put adds up, saying they will be driving to Prague or Hamburg and you can ride along for anywhere between 8 to 20 Euros, depending on where you want to go. This is way cheaper than using trains, especially when everything is so close. It only took four hours to drive to Prague from Berlin.

Host City/Country
What was the weather like?
I arrived in Berlin at the end of August and the weather was really nice. It was a little humid, but it wasn't too bad. It generally stayed warm until really late at night, so you didn't even need to bring a jacket out. September, October, and November are relatively mild. The leaves on the trees are gorgeous, and you need to wear a jacket when going out. In the middle of November it starts to get significantly colder, and it snows. From November until mid March the weather is pretty harsh. You will need a scarf, a hat, layered clothing, and a big jacket and sturdy boots. In March it gets warmer, but there is
still a little bit of snow left on the ground, but you don't need to wear a hat and scarf.

**Describe your host city? Which California/US city is it similar to (if any)?**

Berlin is a mix of many different cultures and ideas. A lot of international students study at one of the many Universities in Berlin. It is "the" city to be in in Europe. Many artists and musicians come to Berlin, as the rent is really cheap, and Berliners are interested in new music and art. I ran into so many art galleries in Berlin. It is also the number one city in the world for electronic music.

**What were some interesting/fun things that you did in the host city?**

I went to the fleemarket in Mauerpark. It isn't like the fleemarkets that we have in the US. They don't just have junk, but artists selling their work, and food vendors. During the warmer seasons they have karaoke at the fleemarket, where whoever wants to sing will get up and sing. Berliners aren't very judgmental, so it is purely for fun. I also went to a beautiful park in Friedrichshain, There they have a Fairy Tale fountain. During the warmer months there is a badeschiff in Kreuzberg where you can go swimming on the river, and during the winter it becomes a sauna. I loved going to Operas and Ballets, if you are a student you can go an hour or two before the performance and get discounted tickets for 12 Euros. Here is an amazing website, where I found a lot of interesting things to do: [http://www.spottedbylocals.com/berlin/](http://www.spottedbylocals.com/berlin/)

**How international was your host city in terms of tourism, cultural diversity, and international businesses?**

Tourism was definitely big in Berlin. Tourist from all over come to see all of the German landmarks. Berlin didn't seem like much of a business city, but I'm pretty sure there were many businessmen there. Mitte was the area that had many banks, and businesses, but still not anywhere near our cities in California. There is a huge population of Turkish people in Berlin, and so when you go to Kreuzberg, it is almost as if you are in Turkey.

**Culture**

**Describe the cultural differences that you observed/encountered.**

**Time & punctuality**

Not all German's are on time, but they are always on time to important things. Late would be five minutes late, not more than that.

**Eye contact & staring**

Do not smile at any Germans on the street as we do in California. They think you are laughing at them, or making fun of them.

**Relationships**

Germans are really hard to get to know. It takes them a while to put their guard down, but once their outerwall is let down, they tell you everything. Some of the best friends I've ever had, I met in Germany. Germans are the type of friends that would do anything for a true friend.

**More formal dress in general, for women, for school, etc?**
In Berlin you can wear whatever you want, except when you are going to the Philharmonic or an Opera. The one thing they don't wear is rainbows. When going clubbing, a lot of the time they won't let you in if you are dressed too nicely. Only a few clubs expect you to wear heals and a dress.

**Alcohol consumption**
I never got checked for my ID in Berlin. You can drink on the streets, you can drink on the U-Bahn or S-Bahn. They are really chill with alcohol.

**What culture shock did you go through?**
German Bureaucracy drove me crazy. They are very black and white, and they always follow the rules; there is absolutely no exception to the rules. I was placed in a lower German class than I believed I needed and they wouldn't let me move myself up, because I was tested into the lower class. Next time around, I told them that it was my responsibility to better my German, and then they let me change my course. Germans are also not always on their cell phones, and they hardly every watch t.v.

**Other?**

**Banking**
**Were credit cards widely accepted?**
No, credit cards are hardly ever accepted.

**Did you open a local bank account? Was it easy?**
Yes, I opened an account with Deutsche Bank, and it was easy.

**If you did not open a local bank account, was it easy to withdraw money from the ATM? Which banks were popular & had low ATM fees?**
If you have a Bank of America Account you can withdraw money from the Deutsch Bank ATMs for a really low fee.

**Were there ATMs on campus?**
I don't think so.