

OBW Exchange: Spring Semester  
Studied: BWL at the University of Mannheim  
By: Igor Cvetkovic

### **Semester in Mannheim**

My name is Igor Cvetkovic and I spent a semester at the Universität Mannheim, where I studied business administration or their equivalent BWL. It will be very difficult to summarize the best seven months of my life onto two pages but nonetheless I will provide my experiences and recommendations. I cannot express how glad I am that I took advantage of this opportunity. I remember sitting at the pre-departure sessions and meetings and hearing from everyone that one semester was not enough but I brushed it off. Now I can definitely agree that it really was not nearly enough.

Universität Mannheim is a beautiful campus and the second largest baroque palace in the world (the largest in terms of number of windows). The city of Mannheim is not your typical German city with loads of historic buildings and monuments and it does not even rank in terms of beauty. However, I guarantee that the people you will meet you will never forget. The reason I chose this university is because it is the top ranked business school in Germany, although the city has much more to offer. It has museums, large successful companies, and breweries in the area. And Mannheim also proudly claims the title for the first bicycle, first automobile, and first tractor ever invented.

Mannheim is also in a very central location and very close to Frankfurt am Main and Stuttgart. You have the option of purchasing a semester ticket that allows you to ride all the trams and buses in the city, but it also provides you with a VRN (Verkehrsverbund Rhein-Neckar). With this you can ride the regional trains to certain areas around Mannheim, Heidelberg being one of these cities. Heidelberg might very well be one of the most beautiful cities in Germany (if not Europe). This historic city boasts a castle that you can explore as well as a gorgeous historic city center with amazing streets lined with restaurants, shops, and ice cream parlours. I recommend going to Heidelberg to anyone going to Germany not just studying at Mannheim or in the area.

Living in Mannheim takes a little bit to get used to but it's very straight forward and simple. The center is divided into quadrants or blocks and each one is assigned a letter and a number (ex. L5). Also, the student residences are not very close to the university but with the excellent public transportation in the city this should not be a problem. However, some residences such as Ulmenweg or Am Steingarten are relatively far from the University and only have a bus that runs by the building. I personally managed to get my own apartment for the duration of my trip and had no problem getting public transportation. Do not let the term public transportation frighten you because Canada's system does not even begin to compare to Germany's (or Europe's for that matter). Bikes on the other hand are also a great option and most students in Mannheim use one. They are very inexpensive and older, simpler bikes go for around 20 euros.

The city is also filled with great/cheap restaurants and ice cream parlours. Mannheim offers a wide range of restaurants in terms of food, prices, opening/closing hours, etc. Café VIENNA is a

very cheap place to eat where you can find meals for 2€ and on. Another invention that a Mannheimer is credited for is “spaghetti ice cream” and I highly recommend that everyone try this delicious treat.

One important thing I can suggest is to establish a contact with someone in the city prior to heading over. Most universities have a “buddy” program and provide you with a contact at the host university in order to help you get settled in. This will be important! It can get very overwhelming to some, especially if you do not speak any German, and the bureaucracy in Germany can get anyone confused. This buddy can be very useful throughout the year and keeping a connection can be beneficial.

Anyone going to Mannheim to study will soon hear of the Stammtisch which happens every Monday night. This is the number one way to meet exchange students in Mannheim and I cannot recommend this enough. There is no better way to meet new people than in a small café/bar with a frosty glass of Germany’s greatest export – Beer. I guarantee that you will meet new people week after week and have an absolutely incredible time.

Now we should touch on what you are going to do there in the first place – school. It will all depend on what your course of studies is and I cannot relate to the others but if you are going to study business in Germany or Mannheim there are some things you should know. Almost every course in Mannheim will be graded on a 100% final basis, meaning your entire mark is determined by the final exam. This does provide you with a lot more free time during the semester than we are used to, however, the final exam period will be a lot tougher. German exams have a tendency to ask you ANYTHING, so something that was briefly mentioned on one slide is fair game. There is virtually no exam review for the finals and no professor will advise you to study one thing over another. I am not saying it is impossible or too difficult; this is just a fair warning. Also, I found the school system a lot more disorganized than in Canada and was a little surprised that German universities operated this way. There usually no class registration and you only register for the final exam meaning no one knows if you are in a class until the exam period. This having said, it is a phenomenal university and you learn a lot, just in a different manner than we are used to.

I understand that this might help you a little but it does not even begin to paint a picture of the experiences I had. This was without a doubt something that I will always remember and cherish. My only regret is not staying for a full year or more if possible. I suggest you focus on your studies and do well while you are there because at the end of the day that is why you are going, but this exchange in my opinion is about much more than just going to class. It is about creating friendships and relationships that will continue for years. It is about experiencing different cultures and seeing things that I believe everyone should if they have the chance. It is my most sincere recommendation that you give people a chance and make some new friends. I made friends with some of the best people I have ever met in my entire life. And travel as much as you can. There will always be people from the university to travel with and you should take advantage of that. All in all there it not enough I can say about this exchange. I highly recommend it to anyone and you will not be disappointed.