



**Ontario/Baden-Württemberg Program
Exchange Student Report**

Academic Year 2016-2017

Host University: Universität Tübingen

Home University: Ryerson

Length of exchange (*fall, winter, full-year*): Fall and Winter

Subject(s) and level of study (*undergrad., grad.*): New Media (Undergrad)

Please comment on your personal experiences. Keep in mind that this document will be published online and is intended primarily to serve as a resource for students who are considering an exchange in Baden-Württemberg. The following topics are intended only as suggestions. Please feel free to omit or add any topics you wish. You are also encouraged to insert images if you wish. There is no limit with regard to length.

Please indicate whether you wish to be identified on the webpage linking to students' reports by:

- First name, home university, subject of study, and host university, or***
- Subject of study and host university only.***

See the OBW website for examples.

"Start-Kurs" (*your experience during the first (pre-semester) month of your exchange stay at your host university*):

I would 100% Start-Kurs to all future OBW participants. Start-Kurs is where you'll meet all the other international students and a lot of them will be your friends who you hang out with the most throughout the year or however long your exchange is. When I first arrived in Germany I stayed with my cousins for 2 weeks before driving down to Tübingen, albeit a tad late, making me miss the actual assessment test you have to take to determine what level your German is. It all worked out fine though and I ended it up in Klasse 3, which was honestly the best class. For three weeks you meet up with your class Mon-Fri and learn German in the morning while the afternoon was mostly reserved for activities. Definitely take part of Start-Kurs if you can first of all it's free for OBW students and secondly they help you with your paperwork, without Start-Kurs I'd probably have forgotten to hand in an important form and messed up my whole registration.

Academic experience (*Courses, teaching style, number of hours of courses per week, taking notes in German, approachability of staff and professors, workload, grading system, speaking German, etc.*):

Academic wise I found classes in Germany to be more difficult. I was taking media courses that were taught in German, which of course was stressful, but I managed. In Germany the lectures are max 2 hours, which on one hand was really great because I was used to 3-hour lectures back home but it also meant that you had to do a lot of preparation work at home. I also took some DAF courses, which was easier and nice because you were in a class with other exchange students, some from Starkurs as well, plus the teachers are extremely nice and super helpful. The grading system is different there as well they use numbers where a 1 is like an A and a 4 is like a D. Another difference is the exam schedule and the actual semesters themselves. The Fall semester (they

call it Winter semester there) is from October to mid-February with a 2 week break in December and then exams in February. Then you get a two-month break before starting the Summer semester which starts in April till the end of July. During the break however, depending on what you study, you may get assigned a "Hausarbeit" which is like an essay to be written at home over the break and handed in before the semester starts again. To be honest I wasn't a big fan of this system due to the fact I'm a bit of a procrastinator and I didn't like having something lingering while I was supposed to be on break. One last note on academics is that signing up for courses can be tricky and complicated sometimes so what I would recommend doing is just e-mailing the professor directly explaining that you're an exchange student and from my experience they're always happy to have exchange students join their class.

Accommodation (*Residence or not? finding a place to live, price, what is included in the price, e.g., electricity, heat, water, internet etc.*):

When I first applied for a residence online I didn't have much of an idea of how the apartments really were so I ended up choosing "Wanne Kunsthalle" as my first choice. You'll have to pick up your keys from the Hausmeister/in before being able to move in and they're only available at certain times between Mon-Fri so make sure you plan your arrival carefully. When I first arrived I was actually a bit disappointed because it looked like the previous tenant didn't bother to clean at all. At first I wasn't really feeling it, my roommates were all really nice but if you're awkward like me I didn't feel very relaxed with strangers. So in second semester I actually moved to Franz Viertel (the south part of the city) with my German friends, not because there was anything wrong with my previous apartment but I felt more comfortable living with friends. A lot of families live in Franz Viertel and the area is quiet in general. Supermarkets like Edeka and Lidl are about a 10-minute walk and the only McDonalds is also in that area. If you're looking for a place with frequent Bus Service than WHO (north part of the city) would be the best option plus the popular student bar KuckKuck is located there where the drinks are really cheap and there's usually an event every weekend.

University Life (*student life, making friends, activities, going out, etc.*):

Like I mentioned before, I found University life here a lot different, mostly because I still lived with my parents back home. I definitely went out more often than I ever did in Toronto, mainly because Tübingen is so small and with a semester ticket you could take the bus as often as you wanted. The university offers "Hochschulsport" where you can sign up for various sport classes at a discounted price. It's a good way to meet new people while staying active as well. Another thing the University offered was "Kaffee, Kuchen, Kontakte" every Friday, a sort of gathering where other international students and Germans could meet up and just have a chat. The most popular hangout spot I'd say would be the library across the cafeteria, my German friends would go there everyday to study and it's usually always filled with students especially during exam times. You'll see flyers for events all over town so just keep your eyes peeled if you're ever looking for something.

Expenses/Budget (*How much did the whole experience cost you? Regular monthly expenses, initial expenses, unexpected expenses, travelling budget, etc.*):

My expenses consisted mainly of rent, groceries but then also money for going out as well as trips. My rent was under 300 Euros per month, which I find more than reasonable. Groceries are also relatively cheap compared to Canada, alcohol as well. There's also a thing called GEZ Gebühren, which is a kind of tax for TV, Internet and radio that you are required to pay, you'll have to sort that out with your roommates. Other than that a lot of my money went towards trips and going out with friends. I didn't really budget my money as well as I should have but I figured you're only abroad once in your life I might as well treat myself.

Daily Life (*Living in German, what did you miss from home, Canada etc..? what did you like most? practicalities, food, making friends, etc.*):

When I first arrived in Tübingen I was super nervous being on my own and living with strangers. Once I made friends in Startkurs though I didn't miss Canada much, a few things here and there but mostly food. Germans have no idea what Poutine is so I was happy to show them except they don't really have an equivalent to gravy which was disappointing. Like I mentioned Tübingen is pretty small compared to Toronto so it was lacking a bit in variety of food. My daily life in Tübingen was usually going to University and then hanging out with friends. What I love about Tübingen and Germany in general is the café culture. Tübingen in the summer is especially nice because of the various cafés where you can sit outside and have a nice cup of coffee while chatting with friends for hours, or grabbing some ice cream and sitting on the Neckarmauer. I was really lucky to have befriended so many Germans who spoke German with me the whole time. The only time I ever spoke English was with my Startkurs friends, which significantly helped me improve my German. We would usually plan to do something every weekend, sometimes going out or other times just cooking at somebody's apartment.

Travels (*where, how long, budget*):

I'm still in awe in how easy it is to travel when you live in Europe. I travelled to so many places my year abroad, Poland, Austria, Czech Republic, Spain, Italy, France, Ireland to name a few. If you book your flights early enough you can get them for fewer than 100 euros, or if you don't mind long bus rides Flixbus offers great deals to travel all over Europe. I used Flixbus when travelling to Nürnberg on weekends to visit my relatives. There's also a thing called the Baden-Württemberg ticket, which allows you to travel all over the state of Baden-Württemberg, great for day trips. My favourite trip was probably Italy where I went with my German friends for an entire week. Again, I probably should've budgeted a bit better but I was always in "vacation mind" whenever I went on a trip. Ireland was also super fun because I was with my friends from Startkurs and we road tripped around for a week, and because they're from there it was nice to have free accommodation.

Advice (*what is the most important advice you can offer to students applying to and/or participating in the OBW exchange?*):

Whether you're applying or thinking of applying to the OBW program, all I can say is you won't regret it. I can honestly say that my year abroad has been the best year of my life. Although everybody has his or her own reasons, I haven't met anybody who has regretted participating in studying abroad. My personal reasons were that I wanted to improve my German and to experience Germany University life first hand, as I'm planning to apply for a Masters later on in Germany. If your reasons for wanting to participate are because you want to travel, it's also a great opportunity however keep in mind that it's not just about the travel. Some of my best memories have been hanging out with my friends in Tübingen and going to school. It's important to open yourself up and remain open-minded, especially if this will be your first time in Germany you will need time to adjust to culture shock. This was my fourth time in Germany so I didn't experience much culture shock but there was still so much I discovered being on my own. One last tip I will give is to learn the language, even if you're not particularly interested in being fluent, it will make your life a lot easier if you understand and are able to speak the basics plus Germans will appreciate the effort.

Summary (*what, in retrospect, does your exchange experience mean to you? academically? personally?*)

Looking back on my year abroad, I can truly say there are no regrets. Academically there were of course struggles, but it was all a part of the experience. Personally I am so glad that I chose Tübingen because it was such a change from Toronto and I got to experience such a different culture. After completing this exchange I found myself to

be a lot more social and open than as I was before I left. I've made so many incredible friends over the year whom I still keep in contact with everyday and it has made me want to continue travelling around the world. I sometimes wish that I had done the exchange in fourth year, that way I wouldn't have had to leave. Leaving was so bittersweet and emotional but again there are no regrets and I've already made plans to go back and visit the following summer.