



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

Academic Year 2016-2017

Host University: University of Konstanz

Home University: University of Ottawa

Length of exchange (*fall, winter, full-year*): Full-year

Subject(s) and level of study (*undergrad., grad.*): Political science/Undergrad

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.

Adapting:

Arriving to Germany was stressful as I had three suitcases and transporting those through the Zurich airport then the train station was quite the ordeal. I'd recommend asking for someone through the buddy programme or international office to meet at the Konstanz train station if you're a heavy packer like I am, just to make the process of getting to your residence a little smoother.

For the bank account, I booked an appointment with Deutsche Bank already before leaving for Germany so the next day after arriving I was able to go and easily set that up. I chose Deutsche Bank to avoid opening a blocked account which I would have needed to with Sparkasse, however something that was very inconvenient was that their ATMs are in one location in Altstadt, so I found myself paying high ATM fees when out of the area and out of cash.

"Start-Kurs":

The team at the International Office was amazing at helping students get through all the bureaucratic steps in registering in the university and with the city! They were really organized and helped the international students step by step which was very helpful considering my limited understanding of the German language, let alone German bureaucracy. There was also a lot of effort to help the new international students meet and get to know each other. I also appreciated how the groups for the orientation course were small, making it easier to get hands-on experience when learning the language as well as for getting to know one another.

Academic experience:

It was a little stressful trying to find enough upper-level seminars taught in English, as many were capped at 20 students who were picked at random. You can search online for classes however the database is difficult to navigate, and signing up for classes usually involved either sending the professor an email or attending the first class and writing your name on a list. So the first week or two of classes were a bit of a scramble but the professors are pretty accommodating and you'll be able to figure it out! In general, I enjoyed my seminars and had great experiences with all my professors. I found that there was much more independence and autonomy placed on students to do their own readings and complete their assignments on time, compared to my home university where there was a lot more accountability and pressure placed on you by professors throughout the semester.

Accommodation:

Finding a place in student residence is pretty much guaranteed thanks to the Uni Konstanz international office. I would absolutely recommend a shared apartment. I lived in a single apartment for the first semester which I found a little boring and isolating. Deciding to switch to a shared apartment for my second semester improved the rest of my exchange experience significantly. The rent was relatively cheaper than Ottawa rental prices, and included all utilities and internet.

University Life:

The international student community is quite large in Konstanz and we mainly socialized with each other which I didn't consider a problem as we were all finding our way through the exchange experience together and shared the same mindset of making the most of our limited time there. The model United Nations club was also a really fun and casual way to make friends and get involved.

Expenses/Budget:

The experience was far more expensive than I anticipated. This was due to not being very careful with my travelling budget, as well as the numerous expenses at the beginning such as new household items. Unanticipated costs also involved having my phone stolen and having to replace it, as well as shattering the screen and getting it repaired. I'd recommend being very aware of the currency conversion, as in the beginning I often had the misconception of products being cheaper than they actually were because of the Euro/CAD conversion. Also, keep note of the fact that many places do not take credit/debit.

Daily Life:

Konstanz is such a beautiful place, especially in the summer, and there's plenty to do. I really enjoyed spending time exploring the Altstadt, and students could often be found hanging out by the Rhein and the Hornle. Germans definitely make the most of their outdoor space which I really appreciated!

Travels:

I didn't explore Germany itself as much as I would have liked to, however Oktoberfest or Frühlingsfest in Munich is a must! Oktoberfest in Konstanz, though on a much smaller scale, was definitely a fun time as well. Although Zurich is the closest airport, I found a lot of the flights from there to be quite expensive. I'd recommend flying from Basel, Switzerland, if looking for cheaper flights and Vueling airline, in particular, had amazing deals for travelling to Spain from there. FlixBus is also great in terms of price. Skyscanner and GoEuro were really handy websites for planning transport across Europe.

Advice:

I would really try to go into the experience with an open mind and few expectations. As amazing and exciting as the experience is, settling in is a long and often uncomfortable process and you'll doubt yourself often but you just have to roll with the punches and it'll all be worth it in the end. I would also definitely recommend doing a full year if you can. Like I said, settling in takes time and even after a year I felt like there were things left that I still wanted to do and experience in Konstanz. Overall, my exchange experience was simultaneously the most trying and most rewarding experience of my life thus far. Could not recommend doing this enough! Thanks to OBW for helping make this possible

