

Florida State University, Spring 2017

1. Your study program or your internship program

I did a Semester Abroad at the College of Law of Florida State University (FSU) in Tallahassee, Florida, United States (January-May (Spring) 2017). The courses I took were Corporations, International Business Transactions, Entertainment Law, and E-Discovery & Digital Evidence.

2. Language

The FSU College of Law offers all courses in English.

3. Finance and other conditions

The application process and studying at FSU are quite costly. Applying for a student visa is expensive (a couple hundreds of dollars/euros). Also, I had to apply for extra health insurance, which was around \$1,400, because even though I was only in Tallahassee for the Spring semester, the insurance company only offers Spring + Summer, which is eight months coverage.

Upon arrival, things are a bit more expensive than in the Netherlands as well. Rent in Tallahassee is quite high, both for on-campus and off-campus housing, although there are apartments off-campus that are around \$350 per month plus utilities. Also, in my experience, groceries were a bit more expensive compared to the Netherlands. Going out for dinner is not as expensive: there are many places where you can get decent and affordable food, both on campus and elsewhere. The upside is that the tuition (which exchange students do not even have to pay) includes free access to many things, like the on-campus gym and cinema, public transport, and sports games.

I bought my books in the FSU Bookstore. At first, I bought a couple of used books, but they were all marked up and I decided to take them back and buy new ones instead. You can also rent the books for the semester, but depending on the courses you take, that will still cost you a lot of money. Other sources, like Amazon, are usually more affordable. Because the first week is the add-drop period and you are not sure yet which courses you will be taking during the semester, it is best to wait until you know for sure, although most professors do ask you to prepare for the first class.

4. Preparation and contacts with the faculty before, during and after your stay

Once I heard that I would be going to FSU, in March 2016, it took months until my actual application process at FSU started. Because it was hurricane season in the Fall, communications with FSU were not entirely smooth, but at some point I decided to go after the application forms and they were sent to me in time for me to fill them out. I had to hand in several documents: a general application (the classes for which I applied were not definitive at all), immunization records, a privacy statement, financial statements plus bank confirmations, a University of Groningen transcript, and my TOEFL scores. Most were easy to fill out, but the immunization records and bank confirmations were harder to obtain.

My first communications were with Ms. Leigh Ann Osborne of the Center for Global Engagement at FSU, who coordinates the exchange programs. Ms. Tanya Schaad was in charge of the immigration aspects. Once I arrived, I had to work out my class schedule with someone; other exchange students had to ask Ms. Osborne, but because the College of Law is a bit separate from FSU and has its own administration, she referred me to someone within the College of Law. The people at both the Center for Global Engagement and the College of Law were really helpful. Everyone is very approachable, including the professors, who will usually be happy to help you even outside of class if necessary.

5. Housing

At FSU, you get the choice between on-campus and off-campus housing. On-campus housing requires you to apply and its availability may be limited. There are plenty of off-campus apartments. Most apartments belong to a larger complex and many of those complexes have great amenities, like a pool and a gym. There are no rules about visitors and the landlord leaves you alone as long as you pay your rent. It may be difficult to get a short-term lease for only one semester; I got someone to sublet her apartment to me, but I did have to pay extra because the lease ended in July rather than May. Some complexes offer short-term leases. My roommates were all Americans and they were great; I have heard about people who were less lucky. Most people have nice roommates though; if you apply for a lease, the lease office tries to match you with roommates with similar interests and personalities, so it usually works out. If you want to live off-campus, you should look carefully where the apartment is; my place was a five minute walk from campus, but some are way too far to walk.

6. Culture

Americans are very welcoming and friendly; people greet each other on the streets and people working in stores and restaurants often make some small talk while helping you. Most people I met were really interested in and intrigued by other cultures; some had never traveled to other countries before and were very eager to hear about Europe.

The classroom culture in the United States is very different from the one in the Netherlands. Especially in smaller classes, the professors know the students by their name and they want their classes to be interactive. Students are expected to prepare and participate in classes (some professors take participation into account when grading) and some professors like to start discussions; all in all, it is quite different from some of the 300-student lectures in Groningen.

At the College of Law, students are really competitive and driven. I met most of my friends outside of law school and they had an entirely different mindset when it came to classes and studying. Many students in Tallahassee are quite young and like to party a lot.

7. Free time

My classes took up quite a lot of my time. Most of my friends in the exchange group were in undergraduate programs, whereas a law degree is a graduate program and a lot more demanding and time-consuming. I spent quite a lot of time preparing for classes and even then I still had to work really hard to prepare for final exams, but the actual subject matter is not necessarily more difficult than law courses in the Netherlands.

In the free time that I did have, I went to the gym quite often; my apartment complex had a nice gym and there is an enormous (free) gym on campus that offers group fitness as well. I also liked to spend time outside in the sun, go to the movies, hang out with my friends, and travel on the weekends. FSU offers many activities and student associations; most of them are free or at least cheap.

8. Traveling

Within Tallahassee, public transport is not very well organized; the buses are not very frequent and not always reliable. The city is a lot bigger than Groningen and even grocery stores are often too far to walk, so many people depend on their cars. Exchange students often do not have cars. I rented a bike via FSU (\$60 for the entire semester) and I walked most of the time (even though the College of Law was about 25 minutes away). I used Uber for larger distances and at night, and sometimes I could use my roommate's car or she would drive me around.

Traveling to other places, outside of Tallahassee, is a lot of fun and quite affordable. There are great bus connections to the bigger cities in and around Florida. Also, you can rent a car with a group of friends and drive around the state. The distances within Florida are quite big, so the weekend is a bit short for a trip to certain destinations; Miami, for example, is 9.5 hours by bus (at least), which is why

my friends and I went there during Spring Break instead. Traveling around Florida and neighboring states is definitely worth the while.