

## **Florida State University, Fall 2018**

### **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 from August the 27<sup>th</sup> until December the 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The course I took were Environmental Law, Introduction to Intellectual Property, International Trade & Business Law and International & Foreign Legal Research.

### **2. Language**

The FSU College of Law offers all courses in English.

### **3. Finance and other conditions**

Studying in the US will cost you more than you expect. Americans are skilled in charging hidden costs. With all the (unexpected) fees, obtaining the required J-1 visa will cost you around 450 dollars. You must get a student health insurance when you want to study at FSU. The university provides two choices: the FSU health insurance or ISO, which is offered by third-parties but meets all the minimum FSU requirements. FSU insurance costs around 1000 dollars for one semester and ISO around 350. I nevertheless got the FSU insurance since the coverage is better and (not unimportant), the ISO insurance doesn't cover incidents caused under the influence of any drug (like alcohol). Medical expenses can go sky-high in America, a simple ambulance transportation plus hospital inspection can cost you up to 10.000 dollars, so make sure you're covered.

Housing is a bit more expensive than in the Netherlands. For off-campus housing you will usually pay around 600/700 dollars per month, on-campus around 800/900. You can find cheaper accommodation, around 400, but it will be farther away from campus.

Groceries are also somewhat more expensive than in the Netherlands. There are a lot of places where you can go out for dinner and decent-priced. FSU offers meal plans with which you can eat on-campus. The food on-campus is good but the meal plans are quite expensive.

FSU offers a lot of high-quality facilities. The sport facilities are free and offer equipment (free), so it's not necessary to spend money on this. Campus also provides other facilities such as a cinema. It depends on your classes how much you will spend on your books. For some classes, it's possible to rent books for the semester, others you will have to buy online. The prices for books differ (from 30 to 150), so make sure you save some money from this. I ordered all my books on Amazon.

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

Make sure to start preparing all the needed administration in time. You will need the general application form, immunization records, privacy statement, financial statement plus bank confirmations, a University of Groningen transcript and TOEFL scores. Obtaining and filing these documents take time so start early! I almost didn't make it. The FSU administration usually runs smoothly but don't take any risks.

My contact persons at FSU were Leigh Ann Osborne, who is the exchange program coordinator, and Tanya Schaad, who is in charge of the immigration aspects. They are both very nice, easy to contact and always willing to help. Take some time how the FSU class network, "Canvas", works before the classes start and be sure you figure out your class schedule. Most courses have a policy that if you don't show up for your first class, you're out.

If you run into any other problems, school-wise or other, you can always contact Leigh Ann and Tanya. I had some problems with the police (not my fault!) and they were very supportive.

## **5. Housing**

At FSU you can choose between on-campus and off-campus housing. Student from the University of Groningen are usually too late to apply for on-campus housing, but you might get in. On-campus will usually cost you 800/900 and off-campus 600/700 per month. On-campus will usually mean you have to share a room with one or more others, and from what I heard the facilities are not great, which is why I preferred off-campus. It's a personal choice however, and I think living on-campus will provide you with a more full "American college experience". For off-campus, there are multiple apartment complex around campus offering leases for students. The facilities in these complexes are usually good and often include gym and pool. A lot of them don't offer one-semester leases, however. You should still contact them, since sometimes they offer short-term leases but don't mention it on their website. Subleasing is quite common at FSU, join Facebook pages (all named something with "Tallahassee FSU sublease apartment roommates rent etc.) and look on Craigslist under Tallahassee subleasing. Watch out for online scams. You could also lease an apartment for a year and try to sublease it for the other semester, but this might be risky. On the mentioned websites, its also possible to find cheaper accommodation but it will usually be more far from campus. I could recommend living as close to campus as possible, since you will need to be here most of the time (and your friends too) and public transportation is not very reliable. Most apartment complexes try to "match" you with your roommate based on a questionnaire, but you have to be lucky.

## **6. Culture**

Americans are generally very friendly, welcoming and polite. Holding the door, asking how you are, making small it normal. For Dutch people, this might sometimes seem fake or superficial, but it's just their way of interacting. Americans are very interested in Europeans, so expect the question "where are you from" often after they hear your accent, even if they think that the Netherlands is Scandinavian or they just know Amsterdam. Take advantage of their interest and hospitality and try to make American friends. They can take you around (they usually have cars which is very practical) and show you the good places since they know where to go. It's a big mistake to think Americans are dumb, assumptions possibly caused by certain political leaders. They're not and even though you might not agree with them on everything, you can learn from them too.

Classes at FSU are far more personal than in the Netherlands. There is constant communication between the students and the teacher, who is always trying to engage the class in discussions. Make sure to prepare your classes because the teachers expect participation.

Americans love shows and extravagant events. An example are the football games in the Fall semester, where prior to every game a huge marching band plays, there is fireworks, sometimes airplanes fly over and of course the cheerleaders.

Americans are very much about rules, sometimes a bit too rigid. Protocol is everything and you can get in trouble not following the rules. I can advise you not to be stubborn and listen to authority. Discussion is probably not going to achieve anything and not appreciated. Try to stay out of trouble so you don't have to deal with American authorities like police! I ran into some trouble while going out, and even though it was not my fault I ended up needing a lawyer. The American legal system is not just and very strict, especially when you're a foreigner, so stay-out-of-trouble!

## **7. Free time**

Expect to spend a lot of time studying since Law at FSU is a graduate program and not easy as the undergraduate program most of the other exchange students will follow. Legal English is, especially in the beginning, difficult. I tried to study a lot during the week so I had free weekends. Try to plan trips and other stuff for these weekends because the semester will be over before you know it. I

often went to “the Rez”, which is a FSU recreational area and consists of a big lake with beaches and land. You can climb, play volleyball, soccer, swim or kayak (kayaks and rowing boats are free for FSU students), or just generally chill and BBQ.

There is no lack of partying at FSU. Most people go to college town where there are different clubs for different preferences. I usually went to the 21+ clubs since the general public at the others are quite young. If you’re studying at fall semester, be sure to try to tailgate at the fraternities, which is usually free for girls. Guys have to know someone or pay an entrance fee.

I spent a lot of time doing sports like tennis, squash, swimming, soccer and fitness. The facilities are superb and the equipment is provided so take advantage of this! It’s also possible to join a team and play matches if you’re interested in doing a sport on a somewhat higher level.

## **8. Travelling**

Americans do everything by car, so public transportation is not well-organized. Getting around by feet can be annoying and time-consuming, since the city is pretty big. I could advise getting a bike as soon as possible. I lived pretty close to campus and I could do everything easily with a bike, like groceries and going to class/sport. Ubers are easy and affordable so I used this for when I went out.

I went to New Orleans and Miami, which are both fun cities to visit. The cheapest way to travel is to rent your own car, but you need an international drivers license, or take the Greyhound bus. The Greyhound bus will get you where you need to go but you will travel with some sketchy people. Try also to visit the springs near Tallahassee. I went on a cruise to the Bahama’s, which is a lot of fun but quite expensive.