

Exchange experience report Florida State University, 2019-2020

Study Programme

I studied at FSU in the first semester of the study year 2019-2020. I did four different courses: Public International Law (3 credits), Corporations (4 credits), White Collar Crime (3 credits) and Gender Justice (2 credits). The Gender Justice course was a skills training. It was focused on interviewing clients. Because it was a skills training, it had no final exam, but I had to do a few assessments during the semester. The other courses had no midterms, but only a final exam in December.

Language

English. The first few weeks, I really had to get used to the different legal words. After two weeks, it gets easier. After my first class, I also went up to the professors to introduce myself as an exchange student (Anna Shum gave us this tip), so that the professor could take into account that you are an international student.

Preparation and contacts with the faculty

Going to the US, you know there is a lot of preparation. At the end though, it was all worth it. As soon as you get selected to go on an exchange, you will have contact with two different persons from FSU: Leigh Ann Bauer from the Global Office and Anna Shum from Law School. Both of them will email you back very quickly. They are very helpful; so don't hesitate to contact them. The most important thing to make preparations for, is getting your visa. This will take up a lot of time. Before getting your visa, you need to officially apply for Law School at FSU. There are a lot of steps to take, but Leigh Ann will help you with this.

Finance and other conditions

Going to the United States is not cheap. The preparation (TOEFL-test, visa, ticket, etc.) alone is already pretty expensive. You also need to get Health Insurance: you can get the expensive one from FSU (around \$900) or you can get 'ISO'-insurance (around \$300). Both are approved by FSU. I went with the cheaper one, because I already got a pretty good travel insurance in the Netherlands. If you want to save some money on plain tickets, you'd rather fly to Orlando, Miami or Tampa. There are buses (Greyhound or Red Coach) that you can use to get you to Tallahassee.

Living in Tallahassee can be really expensive, but it depends on where you want to live. I decided to go with off campus housing, mainly because I didn't want to risk sharing my bedroom with a first-year college student. I believe living on campus is around \$2500 for the whole semester (you can look this up on the website of FSU). I lived in an off-campus apartment that cost me \$450 a month. We had to pay the electric bill ourselves, this was around \$40 a month.

One thing I thought was really expensive compared to the Netherlands, was groceries. The cheapest grocery store is Walmart, but since this was pretty far from campus and I didn't have a car, I did most of my groceries at Publix or Target. Sometimes my roommate would take me to Walmart. Other expenses are of course activities or weekend trips, but you can make this as expensive as you want.

Housing

In Tallahassee, you can go with either on campus or off campus housing. After a lot of thinking, I decided to go with off campus housing. There are a lot of different off campus housing options.

Mostly freshman live on campus, and there is a pretty big chance you need to share your bedroom. Since I didn't want to share my bedroom, I went with off campus housing. I lived at University Village (West Call Street). UV is quite cheap compared to some other options, and apartments were quite clean. I lived in an apartment with 3 other students: we all had our own bedroom, we had two bathrooms and one kitchen and living room.

It was quite hard to figure out which organizations offered short term leases. Most of the exchange students lived at University Village, The Boulevard, Villa Reanna and Woodlands. PhoenixSouth Housing offers rooms right across law school, but I don't know if they offer short term leases.

Culture

I think the American culture is quite similar to the Dutch culture. I did have to get used to the 'superficial' talks. It is really easy to get in contact with Americans, but it's hard to stay in contact. When you first meet Americans, they are super nice, but they don't always want to be friends. They can be a little superficial and shallow, but you'll get used to that. What I loved about most Americans, is that they are super welcoming and helpful. I didn't have a car, so going to Walmart or other shops was sometimes quite difficult for me. My roommates would drive me to Walmart or other places. For Thanksgiving, there were even three American girls who invited me to come to their hometown to spend Thanksgiving. In the end, I spend Thanksgiving in Ohio with my roommate's family. This was also a really nice way to see a whole different part of the US and to experience the 'real American life'.

I think FSU will give you the real American college experience, just like you would see in the movies (literally, it's almost exactly the same). Fraternities and sororities are really big at FSU. All the sorority houses are on campus, and no parties are given here. All the fraternity houses are situated at Heritage Grove (really close to where I lived) and every week there are parties over here. I would advise you to get into one of these parties, they are a lot of fun and you'll meet a lot of people.

Free time

Studying in the US is quite intense. You have to be prepared for every class and keep up your reading. Also, since I was doing four courses, I had quite a lot of classes. During the week (from Monday until Thursday) I was at Law School most of the time, so I didn't have any schoolwork at night or on the weekend. You can miss 20% of your classes, most of the time this would mean around 5 classes during the whole semester. I did miss some classes so that I could go on a long weekend trip. Also, when choosing my courses, I looked up what days the classes were and then make my decision (so that I could be off on Friday).

At the beginning of the semester, there is an involvement fair. During this fair, all the different student- and study associations will tell you about what they stand for and what they're doing. I joined the Tennis association and Chaarg, this is some sort of a women fitness sorority. I would advise you to join a club, because it's really easy to make friends and meet new people.

During the week, I would do some sports or hang out with friends. There's a lot of stuff to do during the weekends, especially on game days. During the week, most people go out at Potbelly's or the Strip. At all these places, you have to pay \$10 to get in, but it's all you can drink until 12. Most bars/clubs close at 2. It's also a lot of fun to go to Collegetown for some drinks.

College football is really big in the US, so when there was a homegame (in Tallahassee), all the students would go tailgating. People will party before the game starts, at either bars or at the fraternity-houses. I advice you to go to a fratparty at least once when you're here, it doesn't get more American then this. Girls can get in for free and get drinks for free, but guys need to be on the list (so make sure you make some American fratfriends) and pay around \$10 – 20 to get in.

During the weekends, I made a lot of different trips. At the beginning of the semester, we went with 30 exchange students to Panama City Beach, which was a lot of fun. It's really easy to rent a car (as long as you're 23 or older and have a credit card) and driving in Florida is really relaxed and easy. I saw most of Florida, I went to the Smoky Mountains in Tennessee and even went to Ohio for Thanksgiving.

Getting around and travelling

There are free campus buses, so you can get transportation for free. At the beginning of the semester, I rented a bike through the FSU reCycle Bike Program (you can look this up on Facebook or Google) for \$60 for the whole semester. Tallahassee is not a bicycle city, but as long as you're careful, biking is fine. At night, we used the bus (NightNole) or Uber/Lyft.

You do get some time to travel since you can miss some classes during the semester. Most of the time, we would rent a car with some people to share the costs. Otherwise you can use Greyhound or Red Coach.