

Exchange experience report Florida State University, Fall 2019

1. My study program

I did a semester abroad at the College of Law of Florida State University (FSU) in Tallahassee, Florida, United States from August the 27th until December the 15th, 2019. The courses I took were Business Planning, Corporations, Closely Held Business Organization and Gender Justice. The courses were not difficult to attend and they were taught in a facile way. The way of examination was fair (mostly written examination through essay questions).

2. Language

The FSU College of Law offers all courses in English.

3. Finance and other conditions

The first cost to expect when deciding to apply for attending FSU is the application for a student visa (J-1). It is expensive, but it depends on the country in which you decide to make your application. I had to first pay a \$160 tax and then another visa tax of \$180. Ordering the DS form will cost some extra dollars as well, but it depends again on the country of delivery.

It is compulsory to get student insurance. FSU will offer two options: either the FSU health insurance or ISO Med, which is offered by a third party and is cheaper. I got the ISO insurance, but also another travel and health insurance issued in my country. I did not have any major problems, but some of my exchange friends got injured and were extremely happy that they chose the FSU complete health insurance.

For me, housing was as expensive as in the Netherlands. I chose to stay off-campus, in a complex called University Village, about 10 minutes walking to campus, and I paid \$650/month without electricity, which goes to around \$35/month. Public transportation is free for students and very easy to use with the buss app. There is the FSU bus which goes around the campus and works at night too (Night Nole), on certain routes. There is also the possibility to rent a bike for one semester, for \$60. Me and my group of exchange friends chose this option and helped us a lot to get around the campus. Uber/Lyft is also an option, especially when sharing with other students. There is also a TaxiNole that goes on a certain route around the campus for the fixed price of \$5.

Food and groceries were a bit more expensive compared to the Netherlands, but shopping in places like Walmart will minimize the costs. There is also the possibility to purchase an FSU food plan, but in my opinion, they are too expensive and not feasible if you would not live on campus.

I would strongly advise anybody studying at FSU to make use of their facilities, such as signing up for a sports club, going to the on-campus gym, studying in the libraries, check the places where there is often offered free food (Law school, Landis Green, the weekly Wednesday market) or checking the Rez Campus Recreation on warm days. The campus itself is extremely beautiful and I could spend days just walking there.

I borrowed my books from students who have already taken the courses in the past. I reached them through Facebook and with the help of my FSU buddy. I also rent a book for one course from Amazon, which was a very easy process.

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

The application process starts months before going to FSU. I had to hand in: the general application form, immunization records, a privacy statement, financial statements, my RUG transcript, and my IELTS scores. I also had to decide on my courses and get them approved by RUG. I would advise having more courses than you would actually take approved, so that you can choose what to follow in the drop off period. Upon arrival, I had to work out my class schedule, but it was not a complicated matter. I had a week to decide on what courses I wanted to follow, after also attending some of them. Ms. Anna Shum from the College of Law helped me a lot in this process!

Everything went smoothly thanks to the RUG exchange staff and thank to Ms. Leigh Ann Osborne of the Center for Global Engagement at FSU, who coordinates the exchange programs and who was very nice and helpful. In my first day at FSU there was an introductory workshop where I found out about everything I had to know about the university and the system.

5. Housing

There is a choice between staying on-campus and off-campus. On campus accommodation will be around \$600-900 per month, but as a downside you would have to share the room, and there is no kitchen available. It also requires you to apply very early (even before finishing with the study application) because the places are limited. These are the reasons of why I chose to stay off-campus. What is very important is searching for the possibility to rent a room for just one semester (not a full lease). It will be difficult to sublease otherwise. University Village offers one semester lease, but Quantum or The Polo Club are also good options to look into.

Another reason why I chose to stay in an apartment complex is that they offer a lot of amenities, such as free gym, pool, sometimes food and coffee. You can also have visitors at any time, which is a bit more difficult when staying on-campus. I was also very lucky with my roommates. I even spent Thanksgiving in Ohio at one of my roommates' family, and it was an incredible experience!

6. Culture

Classes are a lot smaller at FSU compared to RUG and you should expect being asked questions in class and so having to prepare lessons in advance, even before the first day of school. Teachers will have a paper with students' names, which they will know by heart by the end. However, I was never asked a question, maybe also because I was an exchange student. Teachers were very nice and helpful; every teacher would encourage us to use of the extra hours and ask questions. One of them even organized a lunch for us, the exchange students, which made me feel very welcomed!

In general, American people are very friendly, sociable and welcoming. Every conversation starts with "Hi, how are you" and you only need to reply with "good, how are you?". Although I found this a bit of a superficial small talk, I quickly understood that they are just

friendly and polite. I made a lot of American friends, aspect that helped a lot with adjusting to FSU and find out about all the events and parties happening around the campus. First event that I attended was the tailgating that marked the start of the football season, which American students take a lot of pride in. I cannot describe how huge and impressive are these events, you have to see it with your eyes! After that, I participated to almost every tailgate, football game, Global exchange event (f.e. International coffee hours).

What occupied most of my time, except of studying and participating in classes (which are compulsory) was being a team member of the FSU Quidditch team. There, I made a lot of friends with whom I went in tournaments around Florida. Definitely also give a try to FSU intramural sports, such as volleyball or football.

Partying is also a huge thing at FSU. There are many clubs and pubs around the campus which are open almost every day until 2-3 am. Some of them have a \$10 entrance fee, and prices in general are student friendly.

7. Free time

Since classes are compulsory to attend, I spent most of my time at Law school. However, I managed to arrange my schedule so that I had two free days, from which one of them was Friday. Therefore, I had a lot of free time for trips, going out and attend different events. I found the classes to be a bit harder than those at RUG, but maybe this happened because I have never studied Corporate Law before (the topic I found the most difficult). Although you'd probably want to have good grades, which can only be achieved by putting a lot of effort and time into studying, don't forget that this is the time to also experience the American culture and make friends. Those are the moments you will remember!

I spent most of my free time with the other exchange students. I was lucky enough to have an incredible group. In the first week we all (30 people) organized a trip to Panama City Beach. We rent a huge AirBnb and had a lot of fun.

8. Travelling

Travelling can become quite expensive in the USA, especially with no car, but with some planning you can see a lot of things.

SkyScanner and Google Flights were my best friends in finding affordable flights around the US. I flew to Chicago with my exchange friends for only \$60 roundtrip! We flew from Orlando, but it was easy to rent a car and divide the costs.

Another good option is taking the bus (Greyhound, MegaBus or Flixbus). I used Greyhound to go to Universal Studios in Orlando and to New Orleans, which I totally recommend! In general, I advise having no fixed plans and just ask around what everyone's travel plans are. After my exchange semester I travelled for one month around the US. I visited New Orleans, New York, Washington, Boston, and then I flew to the West Coast, where I was lucky enough to meet people with whom I went on road trips to the Grand Canyon, Los Angeles, Las Vegas and some other beautiful national parks. At the end, I flew home from San Francisco. The bus from Los Angeles to San Francisco was only \$20!

Overall, my experience was amazing and I am very happy that I chose FSU for my exchange. I learnt many things, not only academical, but also about the American system and about myself, I made a lot of lifetime friendships, I've seen places I only saw in movies (my most

used phrase used to be “This is so American!”, since everything is exactly how you’d expect from the TV).