

END TERM REPORT

Semester

in DHBW, Stuttgart, Germany

A reflection on my stay in Germany, life in Stuttgart, professional and personal growth through DHBW Stuttgart.

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Preparation

My preparation for my semester abroad in Germany was influenced by my experience as an international student in The Netherlands. Being born and raised in Bulgaria, I moved to the other side of Europe at the age of 18, at the time, without a clear perspective on how different The Netherlands is from my home country. I had never lived on my own prior to this move, let alone in a completely different country. I didn't know the language, nor did I have friends or relatives in The Netherlands to rely on. Over the past three years, I have found strength in my sense of adaptability. I have been invested in exploring the culture and society of The Dutch, as well as opening up to students from international backgrounds which not only taught me about the Dutch culture, but also about various cultures around the world.

Coming into Germany three years after I started living in The Netherlands was an easier venture due to the fact that I already had the experience of living in a different country and in addition to that, I had some of my closest friends at home live near Stuttgart, mainly in Cologne and Karlsruhe. I had a sense of security which allowed me to fully embrace the extrovert I am and meet, get to know and acquire new friends, hopefully from all around the world.

Despite not knowing German, I was mentally prepared to at least learn the basics of the language in order to have a more authentic and transparent experience in Germany and I wanted to push myself out of my comfort zone. Even though Germany is one of the more popular destinations for Bulgarian people, I wasn't intending on spending much time with other Bulgarian students in Stuttgart as I wanted to explore more of German and international culture, and meet people from various nationalities. As a student, interested in intercultural dynamics, this was a big priority of mine and one of the main reasons why I chose Germany to have my exchange programme in.

PERSONAL OBJECTIVE

During the global pandemic, a lot of my in person interactions were limited which affected the way I socialize with people. I saw myself starting to hold back during these years and not open myself up to meeting new people. I wanted to recover from this while spending my semester in Germany and this was one of my biggest challenges.

An exchange student in DHBW

The reason why I chose International Business as a minor in Germany is because I am an entrepreneur at heart. My study in The Netherlands is all about product design and event management, and outside of my studies, I own a small start up in my home country, Bulgaria. I wanted to elevate my knowledge and experience on an academic point of view by having an introduction to business and marketing, and this program was able to provide this opportunity to me.

My home university is a proactive one in terms of its education. Most of my work as a student there is practical and doesn't rely on theory, or traditional lecturing. While I understand and acknowledge the importance of practice, I wanted to experience a learning method that includes a bigger amount of theory for this semester and I was able to receive this form of teaching in DHBW Stuttgart. The facility, lecturers, study material and objectives also resembled my home country's study system which brought a sense of familiarity to my exchange student experience.

Part of the courses required me to collaborate with fellow German and international students, which further improved my teamwork skills, as well as leadership skills. Despite being one of the very few students without a business-related background in academic knowledge, I was always active and willing to contribute with my personal experience, as well as listen and benefit from the knowledge and skillset of my peers, depending on the project I was involved in

While having my semester abroad, I was also actively involved in developing my start up, which is now a small company. For this reason, I didn't opt to look for internships within Germany. Instead, I made sure to apply any new knowledge, advice or suggestion to my business and improve it on a daily basis. This involved attracting the best sponsors my start up has had to this point, new customers, new reliable partnerships and a better financial structure to my work.

PROFESSIONAL OBJECTIVE

My biggest goal was to expand my knowledge in a field I am interested in developing myself as a professional. I wanted to add to my background in product design and event management by learning the basics of marketing and business, in order to have a well rounded stepping stone for my career.

Personal Experience

One of my first memories was meeting my group of fellow exchange students. I noticed that there were a few groups - from Mexico, Korea, India, Egypt, Turkey, France and one other student from The Netherlands... who was actually German. This was the first and only time I felt 'on my own' in Germany as the only Slavic, let alone Bulgarian person in the group. I had a fear that I would not be able to fit in or that the groups will stay tight to each other and not be open to getting to know me. I was thankfully wrong.

I was lucky to spend my semester abroad with my fantastic group. We quickly created a very strong bond and became friends, some of which I'm confident in saying will be lifelong ones. Thanks to this, I was able to spend most of my free time with them and when I could, I would join them in travelling around Germany and Europe, having picnics in Stuttgart, or simply partying. Outside of my exchange group of friends, I was able to meet a lot of German students who shared common interests with me through student programs and clubs that I participated in.

As a queer person coming from a not so progressive country, I wanted to use this opportunity to express myself and live unapologetically while I was in Germany. I visited queer spaces, met people who were just like me and felt comfort and safety in Germany. My highlight was attending Cologne Pride, the first big queer event I've been to since the start of the pandemic, and the first one overall outside of my home country.

Whenever I needed to recharge, I went on solo trips around Stuttgart, visited museums, galleries, nature spots, libraries and many other cultural facilities. I also appreciated the rainy days of staying in my own dorm room and reading a book or bingeing a series.

ANOTHER PERSONAL OBJECTIVE

I wanted to explore the boundaries of my comfort zone and break them. All my life, I have prided myself on being an extrovert, however, my friend circle has remained the same for around a decade now. I wanted to open myself up to create new friendships that were meaningful and share memories with such newfound friends.

Reflection



AN UNFORGETTABLE SPRING

With my semester in Germany coming to a close, I can confidently say that my expectations were exceeded on every level possible. This was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life so far and a great way to find more about myself in the process.

Although it feels like this semester flew by, there are countless highlights that I will take with me both in my professional and personal life. I had the chance to study something I take a lot of interest in, be around the presence of experts in the field and take advantage of their knowledge. I met incredible young people from Germany and all around the world who I was able to relate to and open up to

and I travelled around Germany and Europe, all while maintaining the development of my own start up.

Now that my semester in Germany is over, I am motivated and inspired to continue with my education and professional development. I'm excited to graduate from my bachelor's program and focus on my company. In addition to that, I am now tempted to continue my education in the future in Germany due to the fact that I overwhelmingly enjoyed the way in which I was taught here.