

The real question is where to start? My semester abroad is atypical of most law students' experiences; I went with different goals and came home with different aspirations and perspectives.

My semester abroad began in June with me teaching myself a significant amount of German Corporate Law for an internship. I then went to work in a mid-size German firm's Frankfurt office, starting in July and ending in October, helping them draft English-German legal instruments. By the end of the internship, I had not only expanded my knowledge of German law and gained practical insights into contract drafting, but also advised a client in a subsidiary formation.

The firm also took me on the firm retreat to a lake in Bavaria. My—and probably their—only disappointment was that I was unable to continue the externship at the Berlin office for reasons explained below.

I also took time during the summer for other leisure activities. I began running along the stream that feeds into the Main, and towards the end I ran roughly 30+ miles a week. Though the humidity can be unbearable, thundershowers can be incredibly beautiful when the rain evaporates off the fields into a mist shrouding the river.

I also visited Munich and Geneva. While I had been to Munich in 2005 during my first year abroad, that trip was confined to Oktoberfest. This year I spent much time exploring its touristy parts as well as visiting a friend who works at Baker Mackenzie. Geneva was beautiful, but Switzerland is even more reserved and expensive than Germany.

I made a significant amount of career-related progress. At Meet the Employers in April I had talked a firm's recruiter into giving me an introduction to the firm's Frankfurt office, where I met two associates who encouraged me to apply for an "apprenticeship" position with the firm for my time after the bar. As I happened to be in the same hemisphere, I also took the opportunity to attend the ABA section of international law's fall meeting in Dublin, Ireland. It was amazing—I learned an incredible amount of practical knowledge that otherwise comes from experience, such as how to value corporate assets and what an M&A attorney's work actually entails. I also met a vice-president of in-house counsel for a Dutch multinational who also encouraged me to apply for an apprenticeship. I made numerous other contacts who gave me some American attorneys' perspectives of working in European law offices. The meeting itself was first-class: the president, prime minister, and an Irish supreme court justice spoke at various receptions, and the locations were stellar. The evening receptions were held at a private firm, the Guinness storehouse, and the city hall.

Before I really delve into my actual studies at Freie, I'd also like to touch on some logistical/bureaucratic issues indirectly related to the study abroad. A student residency permit does not cover internships, nor can a student apply for such permit without living in same city as the university. Thankfully, the Frankfurt "office for foreigners" (Ausländeramt) was kind enough to inform me of the provisions for a temporary extension, whereas Berlin's office failed to do so, despite multiple email contacts. Another interesting fact is that it takes roughly four weeks to get an appointment in Frankfurt and six in Berlin,

otherwise you have to “play the lottery,” i.e. try to be early enough to receive a “waiting number” and have that number called. Frankfurt runs out in 20-30 minutes after opening and Berlin runs out even faster.

Furthermore, different offices, despite administering federal laws, have different procedures for the same permits. In Frankfurt, I could get an appointment for issuance only upon submitting an application, and even then I had to wait until the Göttingen office had shipped all my files (from my undergraduate studies abroad) from its office. Berlin, on the other hand, is a total disaster. No forms need to be submitted to get an appointment, but there is no meaningful opportunity to speak with an employee beforehand, and nothing can be submitted to anyone except by mail—so, had Berlin needed the files from Göttingen, I would have needed a second trip to the office for my permit, and at that point requesting an appointment would have resulted in a time after my departure date. Thankfully, Berlin decided it was not interested in my records from Göttingen and Frankfurt, but I did not know this until I actually managed to speak to an employee.

The lack of uniform procedures contributed to me resorting to waiting outside the office for roughly three hours before it opened at 7:00 AM (which, in late November, is not pleasant, especially when it is cold enough for black ice). Some equally determined students showed up an hour later, making the wait more bearable. Once inside with a number, I waited another three hours before getting my permit. Thankfully, that was my final interaction with the German Bureaucracy.

So we have finally reached the studying part of my studies abroad! German public universities are, despite the Germans’ reputation, fairly unorganized and chaotic. Multiple courses had to change their rooms because of student demand and there was a general lack of communication between professors and students. However, most professors were communicative and all were willing to grant me an early exam date to accommodate my departure.

I took courses both in English and in German. While the courses in English happened to be introductory courses, the so-called introductory courses in German were far more detailed and covered much more ground. In comparing the two, I found the courses in German were comparable to courses at Hastings. That said, it was nice, given my stress level, to have a few “easy” classes.

I would like to blame the difference in depth and detail on the professors’ English proficiency. Some Professors’ fluency was less than impressive, but other professors, who are fairly fluent, may have kept the material simple for many foreign students whose English is less than proficient but better than their German.

As for the courses themselves and the legal education, the courses were mostly lecture-styled. Some professors actually read directly from manuscripts posted online. A few of the professors pose questions every so often, and students do answer. Interestingly though, the German students generally don’t read like American law students. They generally read the actual statutes and then, if they have problems understanding their application, they refer to treatises. The adjustment is slightly difficult, as Americans read

decisions and then the statute, but the statute's text is generally of lesser importance because Common Law underlies most statutes. Therefore, Germans spend all their time trying to subsume everything under the statute's language. I spent a significant time reading both, however, as I had to take all my exams early, and in some cases was unable to wait for a new edition of one book or another. Germans mainly buy the statute text and then take notes as sections are covered, but avoid buying the study guides. Another thing to note, the study guides are fairly inexpensive – the most expensive book I bought was fifty euro – but most German students insist on photocopying excerpts from them. I had too little time to spend in front of a copy machine, so I bought the guides and the statutes texts. The biggest problem with the German students' learning style is that, unlike in the US, there is no one book containing everything in the same depth or point of view as covered by the professor. Therefore, a student may have to look to multiple sources for sufficient coverage, which is inconvenient.

I was relatively comfortable with the German material, mostly because I have C2 level fluency: the highest certification without obtaining a degree in German language studies. The professors were definitely pleased that I was so fluent, but I they didn't penalize me for mistakes, especially given the fact that many Erasmus students come speaking little, if any, German. Most professors preferred oral exams because there is no need to spend time grading after the exam's administration. The oral exams consisted of conceptual questions, mostly to accommodate the exchange students who were less proficient or, in the case of the Italians, had yet to apply law to fact patterns. I had two written exams in German: one was a three-hour, two-fact pattern exam in antitrust law, the other was a one-and-a-half hour antitrust theory exam. I felt that the subject and the portrayal of the material, rather than the language, made both challenging.

Honestly, I would recommend the exchange program as an optimal 2L spring semester experience. Students could either enroll in or sit in on a German language course in Berlin to adjust to the language and stay the whole semester, allowing them time to enjoy all that Berlin has to offer (since I hardly went out, I am unable to elaborate on Berlin's offerings). If 3Ls are willing to skip the July bar exam, this would also make a great 3L opportunity, especially if they could use it as a segue into an internship.