



Study Abroad DHBW Stuttgart

Personal and Professional Experiences during the Minor at DHBW Stuttgart as a Student of International Business

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1. Introduction

Within the study program of International Business at the Fontys International School of Business (FIBS) Venlo it is intended to participate in a minor study abroad as a guest student within the 5th or 6th semester. This is supposed to enable students' abilities in terms of intercultural awareness and behavior. I personally decided to conduct this semester as a guest student of the DHBW Stuttgart during my 6th semester.

This report therefore aims to summarize my personal and professional experiences in Stuttgart during the half year as a student of DHBW. It is therefore suitable for anyone interested in these experiences. However, it also addresses those who will potentially take part in a study abroad or are intending to do so in the future and also those who are interested in the experience a study at DHBW Stuttgart offers.

In regard of the structure, I will start by depicting my decision process that led to the choice of DHBW as my host university. This will also include any type of preparation I took to prepare for the study itself. In the following I will describe the actual experiences during my time as a guest student at DHBW. Herby I will distinguish between my experiences that were directly related to the study and personal experiences, that I gathered during my time in Stuttgart. Finally, I will draw my conclusions from the time during the minor abroad. I will also conclude some advice for other foreign students who are considering making a minor at DHBW or in Germany in general.

2. Preparation of the Study Abroad

In order to appropriately explain my decision to conduct my study abroad at DHBW Stuttgart it is necessary to go back to the start of my 5th semester at FIBS, which was in September 2021. By this time, I started my internship at a company called "StaudStudios". Since they are located in Stuttgart, I moved to the city already half a year before the start of my semester abroad. My preferences regarding the minor at that time weren't focused on the DHBW yet. As a German citizen, who conducts his studies in the Netherlands, I initially wanted to visit a country far abroad, such as Chile or Bali. After my schooltime I already got to spend 4 months in Nepal, which very much contributed to my personal development. However, my internship contract lasted until the end of February 2022, by when most universities already started with their semester. Moreover, I was offered to stay in the company for one further year as a working student. Based on this I shifted my priorities and decided to stay in Germany, while I was totally aware that a minor in Germany would not bring me the international experience of getting to know a new country, with a different culture, different people, and possibly a different way of studying.

Therefore, I definitely had to manage with a complete different set of challenges compared to my fellow students. I was not in the need to learn a new language, to adapt to a new culture or

the German way of living and studying. However, I personally saw myself to be confronted with a heavy workload. Aside from my halftime job I had to attend 9 different courses, since I wasn't allowed to take part in any German courses and in order to achieve 30 ECTS. I therefore expected to experience a strain such as I had not yet experienced in my studies. Moreover, I set myself some sort of challenges as well. As a German citizen and someone who has already lived in Stuttgart for half a year, I felt responsible to participate in making the stay of the guest students pleasant and to support them especially in the beginning during their acclimatization.

In terms of formalities, I did not have to care for anything. Since I only officially extended my six-month stay in Stuttgart at short notice, the residents' registration office confirmed that it would not be necessary to re-register me in Stuttgart, so I continued to be registered in my hometown. When my internship started, I was lucky enough to find a shared appartement with six other students from Stuttgart, who already had helped to get to know the city at the time.

3. Stay in Stuttgart

3.1. Internship at StaudStudios

As I already indicated I also conducted an internship during my time in Stuttgart. StaudStudios is a subsidiary company of MediaMonks, an international active B2B consultant for digital marketing. I was given the opportunity to work in a small team managing catalogs and B2C digital content for BMW. Thus, I could not only gain a very valuable insight into the consultant agency life, but also learn to maintain a professional and effective contact with BMW executives. At the moment, I continue to work for the company and am constantly assigned with new tasks that bring with them very valuable experience.

3.2. Studies at DHBW

As already mentioned, I had to attend nine courses in total, which didn't really give me the opportunity to decide which courses I wanted to take. In the end, I chose the following: Information Technology Service Management, Intercultural Negotiation Training, International Marketing, International Social Media Marketing, Business Simulation Game, Financial Market Germany, Alternative Investments, Applied Market Research and Megatrends. Interestingly, the content of the courses and the way the lectures were held appeared to very much depend on the decisions of the lecturers. Some courses were very interactive and build upon a very practical concept, such as the Business Simulation Game, Applied Market Research and the Negotiation Training. This kind of courses allowed me to get more involved and also to better follow my intention to help the foreigners to settle in and to get to know the German culture. In the Business Simulation Game, for example, in which German culture also played a role in preparation, I was able to talk a lot about Germany and give tips on what the internationals could do in Germany to have the best possible experience. In the further course of, I was also able to help out the lecturer. Since our professor was sick, the course had to be

combined with the corresponding groups of German students. The two German lecturers had problems holding the course in English, so I helped out as a translator on both days.

Other lectures however were very theoretical and reminded me a lot of what I am used to.

In general, the courses were very small with around 5 to 20 people and from which I observed this also accounts for the lectures for regular DHBW students. This differs to other German Universities, where courses are often held in bigger classes. Another specialty is the university system of DHBW, as it only offers dual study programs. Here, students are employed by a company where they also gain practical experience during their studies. The company often takes over part of the studies and thus acquires the right to employ the student after graduation. Which was also completely new to me was the time-schedule of the lectures. Normally I am used to a weekly schedule which includes all courses for one semester and simply repeats until the end of the semester. At DHBW however, the individual modules were divided into blocks, so that one course effectively began with the completion of the previous one. On the one hand, this ensures that the content remains much more present, which means that the individual sessions can be better coordinated. On the other hand, this also brings a certain monotony, since courses sometimes extended over the entire day.

3.3. Personal Life

Sadly, I did not have too much time for a lot of personal experiences in Stuttgart, due to the workload of the job and the studies. In general, I arrange my life very similar to the way I do it at home. For me personally, it is important to have a daily sporting exchange, which is possible in Stuttgart in any case. On the one hand there was the possibility to sign up for university sports, on the other hand there are many fitness studios or other sports clubs. Otherwise, I did a lot of things with my roommates or my work colleagues, which helped me to quickly feel at home in Stuttgart. I think that in order to be able to experience studying as a guest student, it is important to establish contact with Stuttgart students, since they can introduce you to the student life. I also tried to support the internationals in non-university-related topics. For example, I helped some of them with the explanation of the GEZ fees, or other small things.

However, I was also confronted with some cultural differences, which somehow surprised me. In advance, I was not aware that there would be a recognizable difference in character between people from the Rheinland and Swabians. So, I learned that Swabians traditionally think a bit more minimalist. Also, the typical Swabian cuisine had not been known to me before. The most striking thing for me, however, was the language. It actually happened to me more than once that I also faced language barriers, since the Swabian dialect was sometimes difficult for me to understand.

4. Personal Opinion

4.1. Personal Opinions

Personally, I look back very positively on my stay in Stuttgart in general. First the internship was probably my most valuable experience in my student life and also gives me an incredible number of opportunities in the world of digital marketing. Above all, it confirms for me personally that my talents lie more in the practical than in the theoretical area.

In regard of the studies of DHBW I am also very happy with my experiences. In general, I would like to point out, that the support from the international office was very pleasant. I always had the feeling that I could address my concerns to our support team, which always responded promptly to my inquiries. For me, this plays an important role, as I unfortunately miss this at my own university.

Although the workload with nine different courses was pretty heavy, I enjoyed most of the lectures. As I mentioned many courses built on a very practical approach, which I personally enjoyed a lot, as it enabled me to take a proactive part and provided a more diverse and exiting working atmosphere. Here, I would personally like to highlight two courses in particular, which I had already mentioned: International Negotiation Training and Applied Market Research. Both courses benefited from very creative and well-thought-out concepts, each of which brought a good mix of theoretical basics and interesting and exciting practical experience. In both cases the exam performance was included in the course, which was a direct reward for the active participation. Furthermore, the overall structure of the course was reinforced by the refreshing demeanor of the two lecturers. My personal criticism would be the composition of the block modules. To follow a course over several days for up to 8 hours in hot weather inevitably ensures that the attention, as well as the productivity in the later hours are no longer given.

5. Advice

In order to encourage others to conduct their semester abroad at DHBW in Stuttgart as well I would like to point out a few tips of how to prepare and how to ideally behave in Stuttgart or in Germany in general. I believe that the most annoying and frustrating thing for foreigners can be the German bureaucracy, which I also dislike a lot. Therefore, I would advise any future guest students to prepare for the semester accordingly and to be aware of what the government or university expects to be delivered. Otherwise, don't be put off by the stereotype that Germans can often be cold and aloof. My generation and especially students are actually very open to meeting new people. I personally believe that the best experience you can have, is to fully immerse yourself in German student life. Personally, I was able to learn once again how versatile the German culture can be and would therefore recommend everyone to consider a guest semester in Germany.