Incoming Student Manual

Hessen Academic Exchange Programs

Hessen-Wisconsin
Hessen-Massachusetts
Hessen-Queensland

www.wisconsin.hessen.de
www.massachusetts.hessen.de
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Introduction

About this Incoming Student Manual

Congratulations on your acceptance to one of the Hessen Academic Exchange Programs. It will be an exciting and challenging experience for you.

This manual is designed to prepare you in the best way possible for your stay abroad. So please read the following information carefully. There are a lot of things you need to know and do. But bear in mind that you are going to be spending a semester or academic year at a different university with an unfamiliar educational system in a far away region of the world – quite a complex undertaking that requires considerable effort on your part. This manual should help you to make things as easy as possible.

Please consider this manual to be complementary to all the information you will receive from your actual host campus.

The Hessen Academic Exchange Programs

Implemented in 1998 the Hessen-Wisconsin Academic Partnership was the first of three state-to-state academic programs followed by the Hessen-Massachusetts and the Hessen-Queensland Partnerships in 2004. The objective of all three state-to-state programs is to support student mobility as well as to implement and foster collaboration between faculty of institutions of higher education in Hessen and the partner state. The exchanges seek to create an environment of international knowledge, cultural competencies and linguistic skills for the future. The three partnerships are supported by the Hessen State Ministry of Higher Education, Research, and the Arts, as well as by the University Systems of Wisconsin and Massachusetts, and the Universities of Queensland.

Exchange opportunities include short-term, semester and academic year programs. By now, close to 1,500 students have chosen the Hessen Academic Partnerships and realized their study abroad experience. Many of them are still actively participating in alumni events or are members of the Alumni Facebook Groups.

Besides student exchanges, Hessen invites faculty members from the partner regions to further increase student participation and to support departmental and research relationships to make maximum benefit of the partnership. It is one of the major goals of the Hessen Academic Partnerships to initiate bilateral cooperation among the participating universities and to provide students the opportunity to come one step closer to a global citizen.

Why Hessen?

Students from all over the world are seeking quality degree programs that will prepare them for the global marketplace. While many US or Australian students pursue more
traditional options in Great Britain or Ireland to stay in an English speaking environment, however, a growing number of students are taking advantage of **exciting and high-quality English-taught programs** in the German state of Hessen.

Home to one of Europe’s major financial and cultural capitals, **Frankfurt am Main**, as well as some of the oldest German universities, Hessen is the ideal destination for international students in Germany. Thirteen institutions of higher education in Hessen not only offer their regular courses in German, but also a **continually increasing number of English-language programs** in a broad range of disciplines. Those programs are specifically designed to provide a high quality education to students with little or no knowledge of German. For students interested in learning more about Germany and the German language, these programs also allow for full immersion in **German culture and life** without extending the time spent at university.

**Before you go**

**Academic Planning**

Before departure we recommend that you talk to your academic advisor and formally plan which courses you will take while overseas. You should get a clear idea of how these courses could be applied to your degree requirements before you leave. Course offerings for a given semester are often not decided upon until a few weeks before the semester actually starts, but many are repeated each year and the others generally fall into the same overall classification. This is more typical of the universities than of the FHs (Universities of Applied Sciences), where the degree programs are structured more rigidly. Home campus advisors should not select specific courses the student should take, but rather indicate the basic categories of the study the student should follow.

Your knowledge of the German language is a major factor when it comes to course choice. Please realize that English-taught coursework is available but choice is limited. Not all of the courses are offered every semester so you should not come on the exchange with rigid and narrowly defined course requirements. Instead, it would be best to secure prior approval for many more courses than you actually plan to take to provide flexibility when you are abroad. You should bring your advisor’s email address to Germany, so you can communicate while abroad.

**Planning your Stay**

Going abroad to Europe gives you plenty of opportunity to travel. It’s not all about studying. You can plan a trip either before the semester starts or after it is over. Even in between the
pre-semester language course and the actual start of regular classes, there is time to do some travelling. Especially if you will spend the spring term in Germany, there will be an abundance of public holidays you can use to explore the region. Students like to use the trains or low cost airlines to travel through Europe. Hessen with its central location is a very good gateway to reach all neighboring countries in just a few hours. So make sure to make the most of your time in Germany.

**Packing**

In general, you will find that what students wear in the US or Australia is common in Germany – of course taking into account the local climate. Australian students need to take in mind that seasons are reversed and that October/November is the start of our winter. Pack light! Airlines charge for baggage, so inform yourself of the baggage allowances. Also, you may have very little storage space in your dorm room. You will find that clothing is usually a bit more pricy in Germany than in the US or Australia. Nevertheless, there are enough places for young people to shop for less. Regarding electrical appliances, Germany operates on 220 volts, just like Australia. For US students this means you will need to use converters and adapters, Australian students only need adapters. Converters, which plug into the wall outlet, convert 220 volts German current into 110 volts American current. Adapters change the shape of prongs which go into the wall outlet. In Germany there are two round prongs. Bring all paperwork you ever received from your host institution: Letter of Acceptance, housing information, contact information for both your home and host campus. Make sure your passport's expiration date is a minimum of three months past your return date from Germany. Bring enough cash to pay the first month’s rent and dorm deposit, plus additional cash for transportation, semester fee and other needs on the first few days. Some housing offices accept credit card, others don’t. You might want to find out about this before you leave. The most common credit card types in Germany and Europe are MasterCard and VISA. A small dictionary should also definitely be in your suitcase, or alternatively download a translator app for your mobile device.

**After arrival**

**Arrival**

Check the academic calendar or the arrival instructions of your host institution for the date you are expected to arrive. All students must make their own travel arrangements and travel independently to Germany. The most convenient airport to fly into is Frankfurt am
Main. From the airport take the train to your final destination. Follow the signs to DB (Deutsche Bahn) and buy your ticket at the Reisezentrum. At most Hessen universities there will be a pick-up service from the train station by a student buddy. Should you not receive pick-up/student buddy information automatically from the host institution, please ask if a student buddy can be assigned to you.

Public transportation in Hessen is mainly by bus, tram or high-speed rail. Do your research on how to get to the campus well in advance via www.bahn.de. There is also a Deutsche Bahn app for your mobile device that provides all public transport connections throughout Germany.

**Registering at your Host Institution**

Once you have arrived at your host institution, you should go to the International Office and officially announce your arrival.

**Orientation**

All international students are required to attend the orientation program offered by the International Office of the host institution. You will have the chance to take care of a number of matters such as signing in with the authorities, getting a residence permit, purchasing your German health insurance, and opening a bank account. You will be provided with an overview of the program items and usually also have a campus or even a city tour. Sometimes there is a welcome excursion or some other cultural event. You will get assistance with course choice and signing up for classes.

**Student Mentors/Buddy Program**

You will have the opportunity to participate in a Buddy Program, organized by the International Office of your host campus. The Buddy Program is designed to assist visiting students with all kinds of issues that come up during the first days after arrival from a student’s point of view, e.g. pick-up from the train station, moving into the dorm room, getting around campus and city, doing grocery shopping, etc.
Preparatory German Language Program

All Hessen campuses offer pre-semester German Language courses, focusing on grammar, listening comprehension, reading, conversation, and writing in an academic context. On some campuses these courses are optional but highly recommended, on other campuses they are mandatory. There are usually placements tests, prior language skills are not required. There will also be German Language classes during the semester on different levels from beginners to advanced.

Registering for Classes

German universities publish an online course catalogue (Vorlesungsverzeichnis) only shortly before the beginning of each semester. Registration for individual academic courses takes place during orientation, in the departments or online. Some courses require registration, some don’t. You will select courses during the first week of the semester. The international student advisors at your host university will explain the process to you in greater detail during orientation.

Housing

Exchange students usually live in dormitories. Housing is scarce in most German university towns therefore it might be hard to find apartments off campus. The student services organization (Studentenwerk) is responsible for placing students in dormitory housing. You will be asked to fill in a housing application well in advance before your arrival. By the time you leave home you will already know your address and have the chance to locate it, e.g. via GoogleMaps. Payment is handled through monthly rents and a room deposit. Both may vary considerably by location. The range goes from Euro 200-360 for the monthly rent and from Euro 200-600 for the deposit. Be prepared for significant expense shortly after arrival for deposit and first month’s rent. Typically you can expect to have a single bedroom with a shared bathroom, shower, TV area, and kitchen. You will have to provide your own sheets and towels, plus, in some cases, kitchen ware and utensils.
Computer Access/Internet/Mobile Phones
Every campus provides students with computer services, including eMail accounts and internet access, mostly wireless. Most dorms provide internet access, while few other dorms offer computer rooms with internet. There is a myriad of cell phone providers with prepaid options or all forms of contracts to choose from. In any case, it is worthwhile to bring your portable devices.

Meals
At the cafeteria (called Mensa) on campus, you can purchase inexpensive meals with your student-ID. There are no meal plans in Germany. Groceries are usually less expensive in Germany than in the US or Australia, especially fresh products like fruit and vegetables. Germans love their farmer’s markets on Saturday mornings. Mid-size supermarkets can be found in the city centers and malls whereas the bigger stores are located in commercial areas on the outskirts. Access by public transport is usually very easy. When buying beverages in bottles or cans, there is a small bottle deposit you need to pay. You get it back when you return the bottle to any store that sells bottles. Tipping in restaurants is recommended, but not obligatory. If you liked the service, you just round up the price to the next Euro or a bit more.

Money Matters & Banking
Upon arrival you will have to cover your first month’s health insurance, dormitory rent and housing deposit and the semester fees, including the semester ticket (bus and train ticket valid within Hessen). To cover these expenses you need a minimum of Euro 1,000, plus some money for trains and buses, food and other personal expenses. Please do not bring checks or traveler checks with you to Germany, since there are hardly any banks that cash checks. It would be best to bring some cash and a credit card with you. The most common credit card types in Germany and Europe are MasterCard and VISA. After arrival, you will need to open a German checking account, because all monetary transactions like paying rent, health insurance and the semester fee, is done by money transfer from this account. We recommend drawing money from your bank in your home country with your credit card and depositing the money into your German bank account.
You could as well have someone wire money from your home account to the German account. This will take about a week.

**Opening Times**

Be prepared that there is no 24/7 in Germany. Business hours are only from Monday to Saturday, usually from 9:00 or 10:00 until 19:00 or 20:00. On Sundays and public holidays everything is closed with a few exceptions: some bakeries are open in the mornings, gas stations and their little supermarkets are open all day, shops in train stations and airports are open all day.

Banks are open from Monday to Friday, usually between 9:00 and 16:00. At all other times you can draw money from the ATM outside the building.

Post offices open around 9:00 and close around 19:00 from Monday to Friday. On Saturdays they are open in the morning only.

**Visa and Residence Permit**

U.S. and Australian citizens in possession of a valid passport do not need to apply for a visa to enter Germany. They may enter Germany on the visa waiver program and have to apply for a residence permit after arrival as part of the orientation program of the host campus. The following items are required to apply for a residence permit: Application Form for a Residence Permit, Acceptance Letter from your German host institution, copy of your housing contract showing your German address, 2 passport photos, your passport with an expiration date of a minimum of three months past your intended return date, verification of valid health insurance, proof of sufficient funds to finance your period of study in Hessen, and residence permit fee.

**Health Care Facilities**

German Medical insurance coverage is required of all university students by German law. It covers the period in Germany, between arriving at the German airport and leaving from the German airport. During international travel you need to make sure to be covered by your health insurance from home. The German insurance is paid by the student on a monthly basis. The payment is automatically withdrawn from your German bank account.

Medical care in Germany is excellent. German universities do not provide medical service on campus, but the International Offices have lists of English-speaking doctors, including generalists and specialists. With your German health insurance you are free to choose from
those doctors who have been approved by the health insurance company. You will find excellent medical facilities available to you. In addition, pharmacists are a good source of medical advice. They prescribe and sell medicine, and at least one pharmacy is open 24 hours. But keep in mind that it is always cheaper to consult a doctor and get a prescription from him/her. The insurance will cover the doctor’s appointment. If you should need emergency medical care, call 112.

**Important Telephone Numbers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emergency call doctor</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency call Fire</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency call Police</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocking of bank/credit card in case of loss or theft</td>
<td>116 116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Work**

Your residence permit allows you to be employed legally for 90 days per calendar year. However, it is not easy to find a job in Germany, plus the German employers expect good to very good German language skills.

**Grading Systems and Academic Transcript**

German higher education institutions use grading systems which differ from those in use in the US or Australia. ECTS, or the European Credit Transfer System, is used to calculate course credit. Your home institution will determine the number of transfer credits awarded for each course you take. The examination systems vary widely as well. In most courses a final comprehensive examination is given at the end of the semester. Continuous assessment is uncommon. Examinations are usually highly specific, may focus on only a fraction of the subject, and may be oral or written, in-class or take-home exams. Grades for an entire term may be assigned on the basis of a single final exam.

**It is the student’s responsibility to understand what must be done to receive credit for a particular course.** You should approach each instructor early in the semester to understand at the beginning of the study period how to obtain a record of your courses, grades, and credits at the end of the study period. It may also be possible that final grades can be accessed online in your student account. No matter what the process is like, **it is ultimately your responsibility to understand what must be done to receive a transcript.**
Before you leave

Before your departure, please take care of the following:

- **Housing:** Cancel your housing contract at the housing office (Studentenwerk), deliver your key and collect your deposit
- **University:** Terminate your status as a student at your host campus at the International Office or at the Studierendensekretariat.
- **Town Hall:** De-register at the Einwohnermeldeamt.
- **Bank:** Close your bank account.
- **Health Insurance:** Cancel your German Health Insurance

*We wish you a successful study abroad experience and that your stay with us meets your expectations.*

It would be great if you could tell us about your experiences after the completion of your studies in form of a short report.

For further, location-specific questions, please contact the respective advisor:

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Welcome to Hessen!!