

# Experience Report Exchange Semester

Study program: MA Development Economics and International Studies

Exchange Semester: WinterSemester 2017/18 (Aug/17 – Dec/17)

Host University: Universidad de Guadalajara

Country: Mexico

## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY AND CITY

Guadalajara is one of the most populous cities in Mexico. It is among the most beautiful cities as well and it is recognized for its cultural richness. Located in the Jalisco state, it holds a reputation to be one of the locations that represents with most fidelity the Mexican culture representations. The historic center, its streets and its people make this city the perfect place to learn, relax and enjoy Mexico.

The University of Guadalajara is in the northern area of Guadalajara. The transportation system connects the university with any part of the city. Many students from Guadalajara and nearby towns attend classes there, such diversity added to the interesting educational offer at the master's level made a great success of this experience. Master's classes have an appropriate number of students for discussion and participation, which are essential for a proper learning environment. The facilities for Master students were very well equipped and comfortable and the university has a wide offer of sports such as soccer, volleyball, basketball, among others.

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

The arrival at Guadalajara, accommodation and enrollment are your own responsibility. Regarding the university, there is a welcome meeting for exchange students which allows you to get a wide insight of the University's facilities, academic opportunities and how it will work with your classes and schedules. It is important to go to this meeting, because you will also connect with other exchange students that are in the same situation you are in. After the introduction week, the semester started on August the 21<sup>st</sup> for us exchange students, we had several issues with our schedules. Some courses that we had previously selected from Germany were not offered once we were there, so we had to adjust for at least three times the learning agreements we signed in Germany and missed a couple of sessions of the courses we finally took. Fortunately, our coordinator at the FAU was kind to support us in every change we required, even with short notice. There were quite a few day-off national holidays during the semester, the last week of November and the first week of December were the deadline weeks for the course works and presentations.

## Housing

The university does not offer any accommodation for students however there are many places available in the city. I rented a room at an international student house with an agency called Conexion. The prices to rent a room with this agency are relatively cheap compared to Germany (usually between 200-300 euros) and they are hard to come by since the demand for this type of accommodation is so high. However, one could find far better accommodation in the city by the same price. The agency charges a bit more than the average because it has periodic entertainment events for students and it offers touristic trips around Mexico for "better prices" (Some of them end up being cheaper than going on your own, but not all of them). Preferably do not take this agency. I loved my student-house experience - I lived with 20 people -, these people were amazing and I would not change anything of what I lived, but truth be told, you can find better housing opportunities and still meet wonderful people, since all exchange students tend to frequent almost the same activities, places, and overall one could say we share similar interests when we go abroad.

## Living Costs

I had the opportunity to do this exchange semester sponsored by the DAAD and its ISAP Program. In general, expenses in Mexico are relatively cheaper than in Germany. Food, transportation, services, and even travelling are considerably cheaper. So, housing would take up about 200-300 euros, food 100-150 euros or even less -I have overestimated this cost because quick heads-up, you will fall in love with Mexican food, and you will want to get as much as possible-, and transportation 60 euros per semester -round-trip from the center to the Uni everyday-, books 0, miscellaneous 50-100 euros.

## Personal Development

I had the chance to live with 20 people from around the world, Mexicans, Germans, Austrians, French, Spanish, Dutch and it was awesome to find that every person had a story to tell, and good things to teach. I enjoyed a lot having conversations with each one of them about Mexico, Latin America, and the world. It was great to manage to live with so many people from different origins despite the evident cultural differences.

## ACADEMIC INFORMATION

### Academic level at Host University

For the international students, choices of English taught courses were plenty only if you were an undergraduate student. There is also the opportunity to take a German language course, or another language courses. The workload as I experienced it, was quite a bit

higher than at the FAU. For 5 ECTS seminar classes you had to write in some cases a total of 3-5 papers. Some classes had lots of homework and attendance requirements are quite high, even for exchange students. The university offers several master programs with different focuses and plenty of courses to choose from. I chose courses that were related to my program and I am satisfied with what I learned. However, I would have liked more courses that were related Mexico.

#### TIPS FOR FUTURE STUDENTS

I would encourage students to visit Mexico. Guadalajara is a welcoming city; its people and its historical beauty will make of your exchange a very valuable experience. Universidad de Guadalajara will contribute to your academic development, as well as personal. You will have the chance to get to know not only about the Mexican culture but also get a perfect insight from Latin-America. As a Colombian, I had the chance to see how similar our cultures are and how special each one is in its differences. I learned this not only by firsthand experience, but also because many Latin-Americans travel to Mexico to live the experience. I felt at home. It will be unforgettable. And I am very happy to have lived this experience.