

Study Abroad in Berlin with FU-BEST

Managing Expectations for a Successful Experience

We see study abroad as a growth experience, and a learning experience about another part of the world as well as another side of oneself. Preparation and openness are key to be successful with that. Expectations can help if they are informed images – the more “realistic” they are, the better you can react and adapt on-site to unexpected emotions, impressions, and experiences to derive a meaningful and long-lasting study abroad experience from them.

Academia



The FU-BEST program offers an academically challenging and enriching learning environment that encourages students to think and engage with the courses' subject matter and the overall learning environment (on campus and beyond) critically. The notion of the “**extended classroom**”, featuring local field-trips and assignments as well as a full-week off-site excursion, is an essential component of the program. FU-BEST is **an intensive academic program** that seeks to provide a valuable “study abroad” experience for its participants. Students who wish to do more of a

“travel abroad” semester might be somewhat taken aback by the **high reading and writing workload** and structure of the program. Freie Universität's academic expectations for awarding credits at the end of the FU-BEST program are quite comparable to those of upper-division undergraduate courses in our U.S. partner institutions. Though we understand that traveling is an integral part of being and studying overseas, more **extensive personal travel** may be best pursued **during break week** and **before** or **after the semester**.

Campus and Classes

All classes take place on the Lankwitz campus of Freie Universität Berlin, which is easily accessible by public transport and located in the southwest of Berlin, surrounded by a primarily residential area.

FU-BEST is an official program of FU Berlin but is run independently from Freie Universität's regular course offerings (which tend to be taught in German and are always offered on a different academic calendar). **Our courses are not open to other students from FU Berlin**; they are entirely reserved for FU-BEST participants who tend to come primarily (though not exclusively) from U.S. universities and colleges. For this reason, **FU-BESTers do not interact with German students during class time**.

The FU-BEST semester is based on the U.S. academic calendar, which differs notably from the German university calendar. Consequently, the FU-BEST and FU semesters usually only overlap for 6 or 8 weeks (depending on fall or spring semester), and you will notice that German students will not be as present on campus for a period of multiple weeks, as a result of the German semester break. In general, **student life in Germany mostly happens off campus** since there is no on campus housing and **less leisure amenities** provided by German public universities, due to their much smaller budgets compared to US colleges and universities.

Feeling at Home in Berlin

We advise students hoping for a positive cultural immersion and integration experience here in Berlin to be open-minded and realistic, show initiative, and demonstrate commitment and reliability. During a FU-BEST semester, **cultural and social learning takes place to a considerable extent outside the classroom setting**. Getting to know Germans is the best and most insightful way to learn more about German culture, practice speaking German, and establish new overseas friendships.

Our program offers **volunteering** as well as **language tandem** opportunities for which FU-BESTers can sign up, but they also require good time management as well as openness and reliability. Cultural exchange is a process of give and take, and will succeed if all sides involved are engaged and dependable.



Transportation

Berliners are **urban commuters**: whether they rely on public transportation or take the car to get to places, the commute within Berlin is **inevitably time-consuming** for everyone on a daily basis. Getting to the Lankwitz campus may also take a while, especially depending on where one lives. All students in Berlin are by definition commuter students.



To give you a better and more precise idea of commuting time, and what that means for personal time management: Getting somewhere in under **30 minutes** in Berlin is considered fairly quick and close-by; planning to get from door to door in **30-45 minutes** is normal, while **60 minutes** is still viewed as acceptable by Berliners. It rarely takes more than an hour to get anywhere inside the city's borders.

Housing

FU-BEST students are given the **choice of opting for housing provided by the program** (either apartments or homestays). Every semester we also have a few students who decide to find a semester-long accommodation in Berlin independently. However, this independence comes with more responsibilities on the student's side.

Our apartment option is **not comparable to the type of dormitory housing participants from the U.S. might know from their home universities**. FU Berlin does not own any accommodation, and the apartment complex used by FU-BEST is not in close proximity to any of Freie Universität's facilities. FU-BEST participants living there are considered regular and independent tenants, living in studio apartments on their own.

Students choosing a homestay will ideally have a communicative and enhancing language learning experience involving the person or people with whom they are living. Please keep in mind that the homestay host could be anything from a family of five to a single-person household, and it is therefore important that students be curious and open to meeting and living with locals who have different backgrounds. FU-BEST participants are usually very happy with their homestays and describe their experiences as valuable and overall positive.

