

Experiences at Dartmouth College 2021/2022

Dear possible future student,

The most important thing first: I would do it again! Although I was met with a gazillion problems due to Covid, I would not want to miss this year (and Dartmouth has been really helpful regarding all these problems).

Paperworks and pre-arrival

Let us start at the beginning. After a lot of paperwork (application at Dartmouth and Visa stuff), housing was the first obstacle. I was lucky and got housing through the college and I know that my successor will also live on campus due to an arrangement with the German Department. My number one advice is to reach out to people. Ask the head of the German department, no matter if you study German or not. Housing is really hard to find in Hanover and on-campus housing makes your life so much easier! Alternatively, there is new housing called Summit on Juniper outside of Hanover. It is modern and nice and has a shuttle service to campus. What is so special about the Dartmouth program is that it entails an entire degree but that also means a lot of work (a point I will return to later), so if you can choose, I would always recommend living on-campus.

By the way, you have to apply for an F1 visa because it is a full program. Neither the US nor the school treats you differently than any other student in the program since you are doing the entire program. So, Dartmouth gives you the chance to experience studying in the United States as authentically as possible by any means.

Upon arrival, you have to apply for a social security number (SSN). OVIS, the international office, helps with that and provides busses to Concord, where you have to apply for that in person. The SSN is needed to pay your stipend. Speaking of the stipend: In my experience it is enough money but does not allow a luxurious lifestyle. I have already heard that they will increase the stipend amount for the next cohort, so you should be fine. In my case, it included health-insurance, so I would assume it generally does. It told me so in my letter of admission, so when in doubt, rely on that. Still, you have to prove that you have a certain amount of money available when you apply for the F1. That is usually a few thousand Euros. I had to ask family members for bank statements and had them sign a statement saying that the money would be available for my studies in the US. I have never needed the money. However, be warned that it takes a while before you get the first stipend. I think we got it mid-October, but I am not entirely sure. To bridge the gap, you will need money. PROMOS is an option here (I used my travel scholarship for the first rent). It is annoying, especially since there is so much stuff you need when you arrive. You can find a lot of cheap stuff at Listen- the number one thrift store in the area and obviously Walmart and TJ Maxx. There is public transport (for free!) during the week that can get you to West Lebanon, where these stores are. It takes forever though. My advice regarding that is either find friends with cars (also for grocery shopping- the coop in town is super expensive and Instacart delivers but is also more expensive than going to the store) or drive yourself if you have access to a car. Warning: a German driver's licence is not accepted by NH. If you live in New Hampshire, an international driver's licence is valid for 60 days upon last entry into the US. Super annoying. It is different in Vermont (and almost any other state up north). However, if you go to Canada and reenter the US, you get another 60 days...

Also necessary is a bank account. There is a Bank of America in town, which proved to be the easiest option for me. Just sign up online for an appointment and everything goes quick and easy. Pro tip: Deutsche Bank and maybe other banks have a cooperation with Bank of America. You can withdraw cash without fees from your German account. I used that to save wire transfer fees by just withdrawing from my German account and depositing into my American account.

The program

Enough preamble, it is time to talk about the program. Two important people you have to know are the Program Administrator, and the Program Director (changes every year). The program administrator is important because she keeps the program together. Everything administrative goes through her and she does a lot for each cohort. She is super helpful so return the favour and hand everything she asks you for on time. She also put a lot of effort into the CompLit Graduate Student Office in Reed Hall. The program director is faculty. They advise you regarding the classes you should take, help you find advisors for your MA essay and so on. We have been in conversation with next year's director, and he seems super engaged, excited, and wanted to know every little piece of advice we had for him. The director can be a great resource and needs to sign your class selection each term.

Your other pillar to lean on is your advisor. Browse online before you come to Dartmouth. They can belong to any department; some even had an advisor from Art History. See what their interests are and drop them an email about what you hope to write about for your MA essay and if they would be interested in advising you. This is where it gets annoying. Many people do not get back to you at all, many do not know what advising entails. Those with questions you can refer to your graduate director. In total, you need two advisors. It is up to you, how much in the loop your second advisor is. I almost exclusively worked with my first advisor since my topic changed drastically. Other students found out they found their second advisor more helpful than their first. That is entirely up to you. Please be aware that people, who do not work exactly in your field can still be great advisors. A huge part of advising regards general academic writing, so any faculty can do that. It is by no means any harm to secure an advisor before arriving in Hanover. Term one was stressful, so if that is off your to-do list that is great!

Speaking of term one: We talked to next year's director about why it was so stressful, so hopefully it will be a little more relaxed in the future. You will have to be a teaching assistant (TA) in term one- that is a lot of fun and a lot of work. The program helps you to find a TA position, but you can also email professors who teach classes you know a lot about. I TAed twice (once because I had to, once because I wanted to and got money for it). I prefer the TA position where I was actually interested in the class. Additionally, you will have a literary theory class, an ethics class, and at least one elective in term one. Electives are undergraduate classes that can be in any department. In total, you have to do at least four of these which are graded. Those were my favorite classes! You can find the course offerings by term on the department websites. I took additional undergrad classes during winter term and spring term because it was so fun. You can also take languages but if they count towards your elective requirements depends on the level. A fair warning: language classes are super intense and a lot of work. Before the first term, there are orientations. These are often geared towards STEM graduate students who simply are the majority, which is a bit annoying. Any open questions not answered by them can be answered by Liz or your graduate director.

Campus Life and Hanover

Dartmouth is undergrad focussed. Oftentimes, you may feel as if you do not matter to the school as a graduate student. At least that is how I have often felt. One example: The commencement information you get always speaks about graduating undergrads, even though you also may walk in commencement. You can participate in undergraduate events and clubs! Searching for information about these is a bit annoying. There is Instagram and there is a campus events listserv. Yes, the program is work but you also need to unwind, so I totally recommend going to events and maybe even finding a club. The free gym on campus is of course also an option.

My cohort was very close! I have made amazing friends there! Additionally, I made a lot of undergrad friends from my electives. I encourage you to mingle with them. They are smart and I have learned a lot from them. They also know the area well and can recommend free time activities.

Winter in Hanover is cold, but it was not too different from a Berlin winter with snow. You will be fine. During winterim, campus is super quiet. I found it quite relaxing to be in Hanover for part of it. Of course, I recommend travelling the US a little if you have a chance. Boston is super close- ideal for a weekend trip and easy to reach with the Dartmouth Coach (they also go to NYC). Montreal is also not far. If that is no option: Hanover is great for hiking, skiing and every other outdoor sport! You can find a lot of organized activities through the Dartmouth Outing Club.

Hanover has cafes and restaurants. Molly's is one of the cheaper options and seems to be the meeting spot in town. Lou's is famous for breakfast and lunch. You have time to explore and try them all. Good coffee can be found at the local bookstore, Still North. There is also a Starbucks. My Brigadeiro offers Brazilian sweets I love. If you have allergies, rest assured that most restaurants list allergens on their menu. Dartmouth Dining is extremely good at that too. You can reach out to their dietitian for information.

Medical help can be found at Dick's House and is free for students. If something costs money, they tell you in advance, so no need to worry. Medicine sometimes has a co-pay- in my experience similar to German co-pay.

Summary

Do it! Apply! I loved it! If you want a doctoral degree, this program is especially useful. Faculty has so much great advice to give and treats you more like an equal than a student! The town is small, yes, but lively. Winter is cold, yes, but can be fun. I made friends for life. I learned so much! And getting a typical American graduation is also a lot of fun!

I hope, you will love it as much as I did!