

Emory University in Atlanta 2017/18

First of all, I would like to thank the Exchange Student Office at FU Berlin for the amazing opportunity to go to Emory and study there for the whole year as it was a life changing experience. I thank you cordially for the nomination and support I received throughout the whole process.

Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, is one of the oldest private schools in the US, and it is rated a Top 21 university in the US. Many in Europe have not heard of them but in the US it is a well-known and respected university that in the 90s had one of the biggest endowments of all US universities. It is a private school, so it is an expensive school. But you definitely get what you paid for — and in our case, what we were lucky to experience for free. The university is amazing — impeccable campus with a soon-to-be-built new building in the middle, huge libraries including a business library as well as many others, outstanding healthcare even on campus and a very generous student health insurance. I could really talk about Emory for many hours as I am a very big fan of the school. It changed my life.

If you are lucky to get nominated for two semester — take the nomination without hesitating a second. In my case, I wanted to go only for one semester for personal reasons, but when I got the invitation to go for 2 semesters for the third time, I accepted it — I had a feeling I should do it. And truly, in only one semester, I would not have been able to make that many connections, to explore the city, the state and neighbouring states, to find an internship, and to learn that much as I did in two semesters. In my first semester, I continued studying what I studied in Germany (social sciences) but I already knew that I want to go into business, not to academia, so in my second semester I took MBA classes at Goizueta Business School which was the best decision I have ever made. I was allowed to take any classes I want — so I took 7 classes which was super hard but exactly what I needed (most MBA students take 3-4 MBA classes per semester). I got to work on different teams, learned many business aspects, made professional connections and experienced a real consulting project for a real company. I strongly recommend taking courses that lie outside of your field of study — especially if you feel that you don't want to do it anymore. I would like to thank Emory University for letting me take the business courses on the MBA level, this was the best semester of my life. This semester led me to a career start at an international company that is one of the best companies in the world.

As for the preparation for the travel to Atlanta, please make sure you have access to your Emory email — you should be able to access it as soon as you get the offer. Your email account will be used by Emory officials to send you important documents. Then make sure you get the tickets when you get the offer — if you wait until you get the visa docs from Emory, they might be very expensive. There's always a small chance you don't get a visa, so make sure you get refundable tickets, but it's very unlikely that you wouldn't get it as you are invited by a university. Once you get nominated, take your time to explore the website of ISSS — International Student and Scholars Service. It basically has all the information that you might need — beginning with what you should do before coming to the US, during your stay, and afterwards. The Fall semester usually begins on August 23 so try to get there at least a week before to get settled. Atlanta is a Southern economic capital, so there are a lot of businesses and especially fin-tech start-ups. It is actually a vibrant and lively city that attracts a lot of people from the US and abroad. It is a Southern city so there are a lot of African Americans. Sometimes you might notice that there still is a race issue especially if you talk to uneducated people. Emory is an amazing place where everyone is welcome but unfortunately it is not like this everywhere in Georgia.

Once you get your visa, pack your bags and arrive in Atlanta, you should try to get a car — this is the most convenient way to get around. I strongly advise against using public transportation as it is not as good as in Germany and might even be dangerous — all the middle-class and wealthier people drive cars. If you don't have a car, the best way to commute is to use Uber or Lyft. Bikes are possible to use but it could be dangerous, too — the Atlantians are not used to sharing the road with bicyclists and there are practically no bike lanes. If you live close to Emory, then you could ride a bike. Atlanta area is hilly so you probably will have a hard time riding. There are also

Emory shuttles which is fine to use, and there is even an app that lets you track where the bus is. It could be found on the Emory website. Atlanta is not very dangerous but there are some areas that you should avoid at night — for instance, downtown. Generally, remember that the US is less safe than Germany — use caution and common sense, mind your belongings and stay vigilant at all times. I haven't had bad experiences on the streets but be aware of your surroundings.

The accommodation in Atlanta is getting more expensive, and a decent apartment could cost a lot. It is not as hard to find a place to live in Atlanta as in Berlin though. Beware cheap apartment complexes — they could have bugs and are usually situated in dangerous areas! Try to get an apartment close to Emory — something in Decatur, for instance, and preferably close to the Emory shuttle stops, then you won't need a car. I lived in a room in a house in a residential area in Decatur close to Avondale Estates, it was safe and near a lake. I would recommend leasing a room in a house as that way you will get the whole "American life" experience. Unfortunately, if I am not mistaken, you won't get a place in a dormitory. Try to find something that will be covered by 1/3 of your monthly stipend. You could look up something on Airbnb. If you are only by yourself in Atlanta, your stipend should be more than enough to cover your monthly expenses. If you have a spouse and/or kids, you'll need extra funds. If you buy books, then you could end up spending a lot.

Your health insurance is pretty good — but try to read everything in the policy documents. It is similar to German private health insurances but not everything is covered. You will also need your medical documents about inoculations you received beginning from your childhood. If it is not in English, the Emory Student Health Center will invite you to a meeting and you will translate your medical records. If you would like to receive an HPV vaccine (covered completely by your Aetna student insurance), do it as early as you can upon your arrival as it takes 6 months for the process to be complete. Other information regarding health could be found on ESHC website.

There are many local places in Decatur where you can get decent food — I recommend using the app Foursquare as it provides really good rankings. You should definitely try Southern food but don't forget to exercise! If you want to know what places to visit, the app can also advise you on where to go. My recommendations would be: the Georgia Aquarium, the CNN Center, the Federal Reserve Bank, the Atlanta Eye, SCAD, the former Railway Belt — now the Belt Line (there you could ride your bike) — and the Marketplace at it, parks, the Coca-Cola museum. Georgia is one of the first 13 colonies so there is a very beautiful old town to visit — Savannah. This place is wonderful! Also, there are many lakes and mountains, nearby there is Blue Ridge Mountain — if you buy a car, go there! To buy groceries, you could go to Walmart (cheap) or Aldi (yes, the German Aldi — a very decent place!), Kroger (more expensive) or Whole Foods (good but expensive). You could also eat on campus — there are many cafes and cafeterias (consult the map on the website). You could also make use of food delivery or meal kits — look it up!

To buy a car, make sure you read something about it online. The title should be "clean," and if you don't want to get a bad car, try looking for Toyota's, old Lexuses or something like this. I had a Toyota Corolla 2005, and it was a reliable \$2,300 car. I sold it before leaving for \$1,900. Read on reliability of old cars. You will need to get a Georgia driving license so that your mandatory car insurance doesn't cost a fortune (though you can drive in the US with your home driving license). Read the DMV website about the process — you would probably need to take a rules test and a driving test even if you already have a foreign driving license. Please note that you need to pass the driving test with a car that YOU bring on the test day — DMV does not provide cars for driving exams. You could try to look for cars — and anything — on Craigslist but beware scams. Try to find an American friend for helping you with the car purchase. Look up the VIN of the potential car — there are some free and for-fee online services. Having purchased a car, you will need to get a tag at the Commissioner's office.

You can apply for a debit card at Bank of America (or other banks) as soon as you arrive — you don't need a Social Security Number for it. Once you have a debit card, soon afterwards you could apply for the credit card — do it if you want to build up your credit score if you ever want to go live in the US. Note that if you close a credit or debit card, it will affect your credit score, so don't open

many cards (or be cautious about it). If you don't want to pay a lot for a SIM-card, try MINT — it is prepaid and inexpensive.

As you are a citizen or a resident in Germany, you are entitled to have up to \$9,000 tax-free scholarship income (as per Germany-US tax treaty) — so your stipend and a part of your tuition fee that is paid for services and books will not be taxed in the first semester and will be taxed just in the last month of your second semester as your income will exceed \$9,000 in the Spring semester. For tax assistance, you can write to Emory tax specialists, and I received help from Mary Andrews. Please note that you will have to provide tax return documents in April — during the tax year end period. You will receive help from the university but make sure you have read everything available on the website in advance and you have taken measures to get exemptions from taxes.

On J1 visa (this is what I had — and as I was financed by a non-government entity, I don't have the 2-year freeze period), you can work. However, you will need some documents for it. For on-campus work, your department will have to issue a permission document for you. For off-campus work as well, and you will have to change your visa documents at ISSS. Please consult the ISSS website for more information or ask your contact person at Emory.

Be careful when outside — the sun is aggressive. You won't need much winter clothing — snow is a very rare event and when it snows, try to stay home: the roads in Atlanta were not built for this weather. The stars are amazing in Atlanta; if you live in Decatur, you'll see them. Your tuition fee includes the gym membership — and there's a wonderful sport center on campus.

Try to make as many American friends as you can — don't only hang out with people of your own nationality. Get involved in international events, participate in clubs, go to the Goizueta "kegs" — they have beer evenings on their campus every Thursday evening. Remember that living abroad is a challenge — you might start missing your friends and family back at home or you will have bad days — just as you do in your home country. However, it is perfectly normal so don't be afraid, make yourself busy, learn as much as you can, absorb, travel, make new contacts and friends, explore new culture, go to the beach (4 hours by car — Pensacola is amazing even in October and April). You will encounter roaches — brace yourself! There might be some unpleasant people too, but not on the campus. Don't get discouraged if something bad happens — it's not because America is bad. There are amazing people there, especially at Emory — and if you have been selected to go there, you surely are an amazing person too. And this can and should be a life changing experience for you.

I wish you a wonderful year at Emory — the most wonderful school I have ever studied at. Thank you, Emory, and thank you, FU Berlin, for making it possible. I truly appreciate this amazing opportunity.