

Experience Report

Emory University (Spring 2023) – Department of Chemistry (LGS)

My exchange semester took place at the Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. As part of my master's studies in chemistry at the FU Berlin I was doing a research internship (CHEM-599R) in the lab of Khalid Salaita (Mechanochemistry-Mechanobiology subgroup), as well as taking two courses (CHEM-729R Special Topic in Chemistry: Chemical Biology and CHEM-523 Advanced Organic Chemistry III). Although I was enrolled as a full-time graduate student, unlike my other first-year fellow students, I didn't have the requirement to do the teaching assistance. Nevertheless, the work-load during the semester was very intense. Unlike the master's program at the FU where, from my experience, most of the workload comes at the end in the form of final exams, at Emory there are graded assignments every class session, bigger personal assignments every month as well as regular presentation requirements. The grade is calculated from all of those different activities depending on the instructor (e.g., class participation, online discussion in form of posts/reviews, midterm exams, presentation talks etc.). The final assignment was in the form of proposal presentation concerning a personal project one was supposed to work on during the semester, which I found especially challenging. The amount of reading and presentations required is very high, however, such pacing also provides an excellent training and I learned indeed a lot in the last five months.

Occasionally, I had a chance to get out from the campus area with my lab mates, who were very kind and integrating me in their various activities both on- and off-campus. I must say, the research group I happen to conduct my internship with was the major source of fun and entertainment during the whole semester. About every Friday we would drive outside campus for a nice dinner or organize a gaming night in the office. Also, two times we went on a hike outside Atlanta (Stone Mountain and Pine Mountain, recommended). There were also official group events, like a visit to escape room, Sip&Paint, and a number of PhD defences that were celebrated. Last month there were organized tennis trainings every week as well as daily crossword solving with the members of the lab. Since most of the life is centered around the department, including weekend shifts at the lab, it is really important to find a group of people from to befriend. Due to the delayed visa-processing, I arrived in Spring semester as opposed to Fall, when all first-year graduate students have already formed groups and networks of friends. I believe this made it a bit harder to find companionship in the classes that I took, but again, I found a great company in my lab colleagues. One of the pros of staying during the Spring semester is the chance to participate in the recruitment weekend, a perfect opportunity to talk to other students and professors from the department, visit a poster session, learn more about the whole PhD program, volunteer and participate in fun activities for incoming students (bowling, bake-off competition, Atlanta bus tour, rock-scissor-paper tournament).

Although Atlanta is a vibrant city with lots of options for entertainment and sightseeing, the campus life feels pretty secluded and it might take up to an hour to get to the city (half an hour to the nearest supermarket). Since I don't have a driving license, I was very lucky to have found a place to live that was 5-minute walking distance from the institute. The campus feels like a small town with its own system of free shuttles that can take you around the university. First month of my stay I participated in a university trip to Montgomery, Alabama organized by the Emory Office of Spiritual and Religious Life, where we visited the EJI memorial and museum. At the end of my exchange, I was happy to travel to New York City for five days, which made one of highlights of my stay in the US. All in all, I'm very satisfied with how my exchange semester turned out, it was quite an intense but also a very exciting time. I'm really grateful to FU Direktaustausch-Team for this unique opportunity as well as Emory and PROMOS for financial support. I learned so much in those five months and it also helped me to see what direction I want to move next in terms of my studies.

Below I would like to provide some recommendations and tips, that I think could be helpful for anyone planning an exchange semester at Emory. If you have any additional or department-specific questions, you can reach out to DA-Team for my contact (email).

Disclaimer: I'm not responsible for the accuracy/completeness and availability of the resources, since some things might've changed at the time that you are reading this. Nevertheless, I hope it will be helpful and you will enjoy your time at Emory!

Recommendations & Tips:

1) Pre-Departure:

- Emory has Immunization Requirements Form that you need to submit before joining the campus (<https://studenthealth.emory.edu/immunization/forms.html>). For me, this was one of the most stressful tasks to complete, since my vaccination records were in neither English nor German. I found a Berlin-based doctor who speaks the language and was able to stamp my form. In my case it wasn't necessary to do the official translation, but you need to decipher your own records in order to fill out the form! Be sure to have your childhood immunization records with you, especially if you're an international student. Bear in mind, you might need to take more vaccination shots to complete the requirements and you don't want to do them all in one week time. I believe there are exceptions for religious and medical reasons, but I guess you'd need documents to support it. If you've ever been at risk of tuberculosis exposure (e.g., lived in a country with high incidents), you'll also need to do a TB Screening Test with results in English.
- Even if you're receiving an LGS Scholarship, you might still need to provide a proof that you have the rest of necessary funding available (e.g., account statement). Check on Emory website what is the estimated cost for a semester and how much of it is covered by your stipend. The rest of it should be covered by your account statement. The stipend alone was more than enough for me, but it's something you need to provide for Emory and it might be requested at the US Visa interview.
- Set-up MINT Mobile e-sim before you go, this way you'll have cellular internet right upon your arrival!
- Emory ISSS Office is very helpful, so I recommend to reach out to your designated adviser, once you're enrolled in Emory.

2) Visa:

- Inform yourself in advance of all the documents you will need to provide and fees to pay. I visited a Pre-Departure Webinar organized by US Embassy Berlin and EducationUSA Germany (shared by Auslandsstudium FU Team) which was very helpful because attending students organized in live chat and created a WhatsApp group for Q&A, there you could also find if someone else is going to your university from Germany (exchange or for a full degree).
- Bear in mind you can apply for Visa only once you get your DS-2019 document. Ask your hosting university international student department if they're able to send you a scan or electronic version before they send out the original per post to speed up the process.
- If your visa process takes longer than expected, it might be possible to shift your exchange to the next semester! Check in with your DA-advisor as well as your Emory program.

3) Classes:

- Reach out to the corresponding instructor and ask whether they could provide a syllabus for the respective class. This is helpful before the start of the semester when you're trying to decide what courses to commit to, as well as it gives you an overview of the assignments for the first couple weeks. I recommend starting with reading assignments one week prior, if it works for you.
- BlackBoard equivalent at Emory is Canvas (<https://canvas.emory.edu/>), most of the class-related announcements come through it. If you're already enrolled in a class, you can usually find the syllabus there as well. There's a convenient smartphone application as well.
- I believe in addition to usual classes you can sign up for any sport/physical education course as well.

4) Campus-Life:

- Sign up and check regularly Emory Newsletters (e.g., The Laney Grad Report etc.) and ask around whether your department have a specific newsletter. This is a great way to find out what is happening around the campus and an opportunity to sign-up for interesting events. For Chemistry Department there's a weekly Grad Digest which is pretty amazing, but you might need to ask your department advisor to be added to the mailing list.
- Check out the clubs and events at <https://thehub.emory.edu> , especially Recreation&Wellness program. They offer a wide variety of trips/excursions (kayaking, climbing, hiking, horseback-riding) every weekend of the semester. Also, ISSS organizes free lunches for international students every Friday, for which you need to sign up (RSVP) on the hub.
- Go to Woodruff Physical Education Center (WPEC) for a swim/run/bouldering/tennis/etc (need student card to enter the facilities!)
- If you are a film buff check out the Emory Cinematheque, a free cinema organized by Film and Media department. They have a curated program with a different focus every semester. (<https://filmandmedia.emory.edu/news-events/emory-cinematheque.html>)
- I believe you can also take a free shuttle to Emory Oxford campus which is very close to Covington, GA, a small town with old-style architecture where a number of TV series/movies (e.g. Vampire Diaries) were filmed.
- Take a walk in Lullwater Preserve that's right on Emory Campus.

- If you're receiving a stipend from Emory you probably need to pay taxes before April 15th. Reach out to your ISSS adviser and/or Emory Tax Office for details on your case.

5) Dining:

- Lunch at Dobbs Common Tables (DCT) is the closest equivalent of Mensa, however it's an all-you-can-eat-buffet-format, for which you pay 20\$ (most undergraduate students, however, are enrolled in meal plans). Since it's quite expensive for a meal, see if the registration to get three free meals is open, no documents were required (<https://dining.emory.edu/resources/FSSP.html>). Overview of all dining locations and opening hours: <https://emoryatlanta.cafebonappetit.com>. I liked The Depot by Caldi's Coffee as well, but haven't tried other locations.
- Campus Dining is pretty expensive, so my usual go-to places were all in Emory Village (e.g., Falafel King, Chipotle, Dave's Cosmic Sub). Most often though, since I was living close to campus, I was able to walk home make a fast lunch and then get back to the uni again.

6) Transportation:

- Make use of Emory Shuttles and download TransLoc App to track them! I used to take one for grocery shopping (it's free for everyone and you don't have to show your Emory ID).
- If you'll have to rely on public transport, download MARTA App and get a Breeze Card (you can order it in advance so it arrives in your post-box, or buy at the nearest metro station) <https://www.itsmarta.com/manage-your-cards.aspx>
- If you need to go to IKEA with public transport there's a free Atlantic Station Shuttle going from Arts Center MARTA Station (Passio GO! App to track the location and availability) *To request a stop in a bus/shuttle you need to pull on the cord...
- Otherwise, you can always use Lyft or Uber (I was using it only on my trips from/to the airport).
- Don't hesitate asking people that you work with, usually they are happy to give you a ride or take for grocery shopping.
- Biking is also an option to/around campus (I believe you can get a bike at Emory <https://transportation.emory.edu/bike-emory>). However, the drivers in

7) Housing:

- I used following resources: Emory Off-Campus Housing portal (<https://offcampushousing.emory.edu/housing> Emory email needed to sign up), Facebook group "Emory & Georgia Tech Subleases, Roommates, Apartments & Housing" (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/EmorySubleasesRoommates>). I found FB much more helpful and the group is where I found my sublease deal.
- When looking for housing keep in mind, that Emory shuttles is a nice, free way to get to the campus. I would consult with the map (https://transportation.emory.edu/uploads/route_maps/2023-campus-connectivity-smr-combo.pdf) or the TransLoc App to see if the place you are contemplating might have a shuttle stop (not just a route!) nearby. Same for MARTA buses, however from my experience they are not always reliable so, ideally, you find an accommodation where you won't be dependent on them to get to the campus.

8) Health/Safety:

- Once you have your Emory Health Insurance you can set up Medical ID Card in Aetna Health application for convenience.
- If you need to see a doctor you can schedule an appointment with Student Health Services here <https://studenthealth.emory.edu/services/appointment.html>. You need to have your student number ready.
- You can download the Emory safety mobile app. I was recommended to have a pepper spray on me if I frequently walk alone at night (you can purchase it online). https://news.emory.edu/stories/2016/11/er_live_safe_app/campus.html

9) Groceries/Shopping:

- I usually went to Kroger (Emory shuttle route B), there's also a nice Peavine Creek Trail from the south of Emory that almost reaches the supermarket. I'd recommend getting a Kroger card at the check-out the first time you go there.
- Lenox Square has to offer most of what you might need for the rest of the shopping.

10) Atlanta To-Do List:

- Try breakfast at Waffle House (open-all-night southern eatery).
- Visit Piedmont Park and Virginia Highlands.
- Visit Little Five Points area for thrifting and curiosity shops as well as good food.
- Ponce City Market. It also has a paid roof-top view on Atlanta City and access to Atlanta BeltLine Trail.
- Go on a hike, there are many beautiful trails and parks around Atlanta (Sweetwater Creek State Park, East Palisades Trail etc.)