

New York University, Graduate School of Arts and Science, International Relations Department: Fall Term 2019

First of all, if you're reading this report after having been nominated for an exchange at NYU, let me congratulate you on the distinction, and wish you a rewarding and exciting experience in New York City. If you are still contemplating whether to choose NYU as your primary destination, I hope this report will take away some of your doubts, and help you make a well-informed, deliberate choice. Without further ado...

1. A Few Words About Organization and Bureaucracy

A single academic term, perhaps an entire year even, is barely enough to become familiar with a different institutional context and a new city. Because of that, meticulous planning and organization ahead of your trip will be necessary to help you transition smoothly, and save you some of the unavoidable stress. I went to New York determined to make the most out of my stay, even with the little time I had; the NYU study away advisors were beyond helpful in facilitating that process, and have guided me through the administrative maze of New York University before and after my arrival. Don't be shy to email the Office of Global Programs about any questions or doubts you may have, as they're fairly responsive and will most likely help you out or direct you further. On campus, the StudentLink Center provides a range of useful services too; in most cases regarding general administrative questions, it was my primary point of contact. Being one of New York City's largest employers, NYU hires squadrons of staff; paired with technological mediation it makes the entire experience of finding the right counselor to answer your questions largely efficient and quick. There're good chances you'll be assigned a competent person to talk to within minutes.

Before the trip, it is of utmost importance to take care of the mandatory health insurance plan. Because previous reports described the tedious task of trying to wave the insurance requirements and the high costs of the American plan rather extensively, I won't elaborate on that, as there's nothing constructive I can add. In my case, I wasn't able to wave out and had to pay for the insurance plan recommended by NYU. Alas.

After arriving in New York, it is crucial to have an NYU Student ID issued as soon as possible; without it, you won't be able to access most of the university facilities or use printers and copy machines. There's an automated gate or a security guard at the entrance of each building on campus, and the Student ID is your only pass. The ID also means free or significantly reduced entry at some of the most popular cultural venues and museums (e.g. MoMa). The easiest way to get the ID is to head directly to the Department of Public Safety at 7 Washington Place.

The University and its individual departments offer countless events both at the beginning and throughout the semester. Events ranging from the classic orientation/organizational briefings and campus tours, group sight-seeing trips and sport events, to career Q&A's and happy hours are a helpful and mostly fun way to navigate yourself through the American academic system and a different cultural environment. It's also one of the best ways to get to know your fellow students (more about networking in the latter part of my report). The "NYU Mobile" App makes it easy to keep track of the events schedule.

An exchange at NYU includes a stipend. To receive it, you'll either have to open an American bank account, or cash a check. Regardless of your choice, however, be prepared to have an "employee tax" deducted from the nominal sum. Unless you're a US citizen, it is in your best interest to get in touch with the bursar's office and "NYU Glacier" right away after receiving the money, and file the necessary forms to assure the deducted amount will be returned to you. In retrospect, the stipend-related tax issues and the IRS caused the only major bureaucratic headache during my entire stay. As a matter of fact, at the time of writing this report, I'm waiting for documents filed in November to still be processed.

2. Living and Accommodation

New York City isn't cheap. Monthly rent costs can look especially intimidating, with prices twice, even three times as high as in Berlin. Nonetheless, it shouldn't discourage you from looking at options other than on-campus housing, as it is possible to find a room off campus for a comparable price.

I decided against on-campus housing to diversify my experience aboard, get to know a different borough, and make friends also outside the academia. The massive demand makes finding a place on the NY housing market quite competitive, but, again, it's not impossible. It took some time and effort but I managed to find a room in Brooklyn's East Williamsburg through an app called "Roomi". Facebook groups like "Gypsy Housing NYC" or, at worst, Craigslist, are also decent options to start the room hunt. However, I would strongly recommend anyone looking for accommodation in NYC to visit the place in person; scams are, unfortunately, a rather common practice.

General living costs in New York are also something to keep in mind. For example, tuition costs do not include a semester-ticket for public transportation. Fruits and veggies are quite expensive, and so is eating out ("Mamoun's Falafel" on McDougal Street is probably one of

the best and most affordable lunch options around the Washington Square Park area. It's certainly worth recommending).

3. NYU

Small classes and close relationships with the Professors appear to be the standard at NYU. The faculty was very responsive and readily available to talk to even outside class, also in terms of career advice. Networking itself is a major part of the study experience, and, at least at the International Relations department, was constantly emphasized and furthered. Exchanging contact numbers and "grabbing a coffee" with fellow students and the faculty members is not only common, but, to some degree, even expected. It is not unusual to receive an internship or job offer from the Professor. A variety of clubs, student jobs (also for international students), but also career and networking events are a great opportunity to become part of the social life on campus. During my stay, I became involved in the IR department's student "Journal of Political Inquiry" and supported the publication in my capacity as the managing editor.

In class, a study environment based on personal exchange and familiarity with the rest of the students is a norm. Group work and feedback-based writing workshops were a fixed part of the study dynamic. Some of the more restricted classes were selection-based and required a written introduction and a motivation letter, but it's worth taking the additional effort. Such classes are usually taught by prominent academics and experts, and are limited to a total of 8-10 students. In my case, I had the pleasure to attend classes taught by several people associated with the Obama administration, like Joe Biden's former speech-writer, or a policy advisor to Senator Chuck Schumer.

It's also relevant to say a word about the institutional differences between the American and German higher education system. Mid-term exams and weekly assignments, on top of the required reading material, made the learning experience quite demanding and required constant commitment. Final grades are calculated based on the total of all the grades received throughout the semester (mid-terms, and other minor tasks) and the results of the final assignment/exam.

4. In retrospect...

Even though at first the thought of living and studying in New York City seemed equally intimidating and stressful as it was exciting, the exchange experience provided me with many opportunities to grow not only academically, but also personally. During my stay at NYU, I was given a chance to broaden my research interests, consult them with leading experts in the field, and expand my academic network. It was also an opportunity to test my capacities for performing in a demanding, fast-paced environment, and confront my ideas and opinions on a diverse, international forum. I'm deeply convinced that the experience I've gained and relationships I've made during the exchange semester will reverberate long after receiving my M.A. diploma.