

Erfahrungsbericht Direktaustausch zwischen der FU Berlin und der Stanford University im WS 2022/23

This report summarizes my fantastic research stay made possible thanks to the Direct Exchange. I was at the Stanford Department of English for three quarters of the academic year 2022/2023 from September to June (I could have stayed til July with the grace period). While it was challenging and time consuming to deal with the bureaucracy, especially at the beginning of my stay (and prior to my arrival!), the atmosphere on campus, the events, and libraries contributed to making my experience wonderful! I truly believe it was one of the best decisions and research experiences of my life. I want to share my suggestions and explore the good and challenging aspects of it.

VISA

I needed to apply for a student visa in early summer. I received my VSR letter on June 28th. After that, I notified the Stanford English department that sent me the necessary documents via post, and then I went to the embassy in early August after going through the bureaucratic process. I recommend planning well in advance – checking the waiting time at the embassy and staying in touch with the Stanford Bechtel International Center and your department at Stanford.

First Steps

I received my admission as a Visiting Student Researcher and my acceptance for a scholarship. The PDF with my admission included a link to set up my SUNet ID. This is an account for all the services at Stanford, especially ‘Axess.’ With the help of this account, I was able to log in to Axess. There, I directly uploaded my photo and applied for my student ID. I received the ID card the very same day and picked it up on campus at the ‘Tresidder’ (first floor) building. It was also important that I applied directly for an exemption from Stanford's health insurance. Following the advice of many PhD students, I didn't go for Cardinal Care and opted for another cheaper but safe option: ISO Student Health Insurance (Stanford J1). To get the exemption from Stanford's health insurance, I needed a certificate from the new health insurance company. Be careful with the exemption deadline! A few days after my arrival, I sent an email to the secretary and joined welcome events at the department.

How to Move Around on Campus / in the Bay Area

Caltrain is the train service. There are often many delays, and trains do not run as frequently as in Europe. Marguerite is the free shuttle that connects different parts of the Stanford Campus, and it offers impeccable service. A bike was a game-changer for me on campus; I bought a second-hand one on SUPost. However, the bus service is not as reliable as the European one.

Scholarship and Account

I opened an account at Stanford Credit Union and had a great experience with it. I was able to transfer money from my US account to my German account via the provider Wise, with no permissions or high fees required. When you have opened the account, you should directly deposit your bank details with Axess so the first installment of the scholarship will arrive on time in September to your account. In addition, you should directly write to your host department to request the payment of the scholarship. You can also request an exemption from Stanford using the W8BEN form before the end of the winter quarter.

Housing

Unfortunately, I was not able to get a dorm room on campus through the housing lottery; I could only apply from September 1st. I managed to find a room in Sunnyvale through Facebook groups and then a second room through Reddit. I suggest using SUPost and other websites dedicated to Stanford students searching for a room. Be cautious, as there are a lot of scammers! Life on campus can be really interesting as there are so many clubs, associations, and events. If you find a room on campus, you will probably have a really wonderful experience. Save some money for the deposit that you will have to pay in advance. A room in Palo Alto can cost from minimum of \$1200-1300 to \$1500-1600.

Academic Life

Researchers don't have the possibility to actively take classes and audit. However, upon request, the Registrar's Office confirmed that my participation in the direct exchange or the FU-Stanford-Fellowship entitled me to participate. So, a lot is possible if you just ask! To participate in courses, I simply sent an email to the respective lecturer beforehand and asked them whether they were open to my participation. The experience in the courses themselves was incredible. There was a lively, active culture of discussion, and I felt like I learned a lot by just attending. There are also many lec-

tures and events with important guests coming to Stanford. Everyone was quite friendly and happy to talk to me. There are several incredible libraries on campus where you can work well, depending on your preference. I found Green Library to be the best place to study, as well as the Graduate Students Lounge in my department.

Free Time

There is a range of sports and leisure activities at Stanford. At the same time, many student organizations offer events, book clubs, excursions, etc. To get a first orientation, you can contact the “Graduate Life Office (GLO).” GLO offers especially at the beginning of the first quarter orientation events. There is also an LGBTQ+ center. The Bechtel International Center organizes many good events. In addition, San Francisco is a wonderful city to explore, as well as Santa Cruz, and small cities like Santa Clara, Redwood City, Sunnyvale, and Mountain View. Buying food on campus can be expensive, but the cost of living is much higher in general. Don’t miss natural places like the Stanford Dish, Palo Alto Badlands Nature Preserve, and Yosemite National Park. Join the VSR group and international societies to get to know more people.