

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
2015/16

Urbana-Champaign is a small campus town in the middle of nowhere. It is surrounded by nothing but cornfields. Most of the inhabitants are students. The American students are mostly from Chicago which is a two hour bus/train/car ride away. The university campus which is apparently one of the most beautiful ones in the country is the heart of town. I really appreciated the experience of living in a college town since it is very different from going to a university in a big city.

## Architecture

Universities in the US are fundamentally different from European universities. Students are required to pay incredible amounts of money for their classes.

That influences the way students are treated. You are seen as a client and you therefore often get free snacks, professors learn your name and ask you about your holidays. The critiques are less harsh. To the point even when it is hard to figure out what other people's opinion on your project is. The atmosphere is generally very nice and friendly. The local exchange coordinator is awesome and is always there to help you.

I was very surprised and happy that on arrival we were asked to take one of the graduate studios which was an absolutely great experience.

There were ten professors introducing their studio in the beginning of the semester and the 150 Graduate students choose between the different projects. The projects are mainly hospitals, libraries and skyscrapers but also some small scale projects.

I really liked the studio spaces with huge wooden desks and lots of daylight.

One of the studios is taking place in Chicago. If you consider taking that studio you should think about renting an apartment for only half a year.

Since there are no other mandatory classes you are free to choose anything that interests you. There are many non-major classes from other departments (Arts, Photography, Scenography, Music, Dance, etc.). Most of the architectural seminars are very much like being back in high school with homework, assignments, exams and weekly readings.

During my first semester I took a furniture studio and spent a lot of time in the wood shop and I would definitely recommend to make a training session and use those facilities.

One thing you should consider though is bringing a Geodreieck

and Ponal/Holzleim. Both are not sold in this country and I am currently struggling to work without. Talking about struggling; be aware that you will have to work with the imperial system (inches and feet) at some point which is a pain to say the least.

## Organization

Exchange students from Munich pay an administrative fee of about 300 dollars and another 300 for a health insurance (which can be waived if you already have an insurance of the same quality) per semester.

Rents are about 500 dollars per month depending on the location.

Special attention should be paid to the location of supermarkets and the location of the Architecture building which is located at the south end of campus.

You could also apply for a spot in one of the dorms which I would not recommend since rooms are tiny and you are required to pay a lot of money for the included food. Other people though enjoyed that you meet lots of people there, especially first year Bachelor students who are required to live in dorms.

If you want to live with other exchange students you can look into the Round Table Houses.

In case you are interested in doing an internship over the summer your Visa will be extended for three months.

## Transportation

There is a free bus service provided for students and a late-night free taxi service. Some students have a car. I chose to get a second hand bike and was very content with that choice.

## College Life

If you manage not to get caught up in work too much enjoying the typical American college life is definitely worth it! Urbana-Champaign is known as one of the best/craziest party campuses in the U.S. The bars on campus are super busy on weekends, but that's just the start of it. When walking through town on a Friday or Saturday night you will see or hear parties in every apartment block. Then there is also the whole Greek community (sororities and fraternities) which is a fascinating phenomenon.

It certainly is a small town but in spite or perhaps because of it the inhabitants are very creative when it comes to organizing events and things to do. The University organizes

movie nights every weekend, karaoke, a yearly pumpkin carving contest. The Centre of Performing Arts has a wine tasting night with live-music as well as musicals, operas and concerts. The Music building is showing Graduate student recitals. The Architecture department has a guest lecture every Monday with snacks. All these events are free. As are both gyms on campus (with indoor and outdoor pools, a rock climbing wall, etc.). Interesting are the numerous student organizations that organize excursions, events and activities like Ultimate Frisbee, Quidditch and other crazy stuff. Another thing that is really big here is eating out. The app hooked will keep you up to date with all the daily specials. One of the local specialties is the deep dish pizza. Originally from Chicago is a pizza that is more of a quiche than a flat Italian pizza filled with an overload of cheese and tomato sauce. More great American food is sold from the food trucks (Pandamonium for creative doughnut flavours and all-day breakfast at Cracked) that park on campus. For a healthier alternative you can always stop by the local Farmer's Market on Saturdays. If you wonder what else you could bring for the two semesters here: Warm winter clothes! The climate is rather continental with hot summers and very cold and very windy winters.

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