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Spending a Semester Abroad at Augsburg College – A Great Experience

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My name is Stefanie, I'm 24 years old and a business and engineering student at the University of Cooperative Education in Heidenheim, Germany. This fall I'm spending a semester abroad at Augsburg.

I learned about the opportunity to go to Minneapolis from a fellow student in Germany. A student from Augsburg College had attended my home university last year and now there was a chance for one student from my school to go to Augsburg in exchange. This aroused my interest because I had liked studying English at school and was interested in the United States with its diversity, opportunities, and technological advances. I had learned a lot through the media and from people who had been to the U.S. and returned with positive impressions. And where else can you learn a language better than in a country where it's the native language?

So I went to get further information from the international office at my school. By fortunate coincidence, Dr. Nadia Christensen, director of International Partners at Augsburg, was visiting at that time. She gave me lot of information about the college, the city, and the program. This was really helpful, because spending almost four months in a foreign country is a big decision. I needed time to think about questions like: What do I expect, and is it really what I want? Although it was a great opportunity, it also meant being away from home, family, and friends for some time. I considered this in my decision process too.

In the end however, arguments for going to the United States were far stronger than those for not going. I arrived here in late August and had a few days to get assimilated into my "new home" and to meet my roommates. Then classes started, and I discovered that the educational system here is a bit different from Germany; for example, midterm exams are new to me. At my university I usually have only one final exam, or one presentation, at the end of the semester. Also, my semesters of classes alternate with "internship semesters" when I work fulltime at Hauff-Technik, a company that manufactures cable and pipe sealing systems.

In the past weeks I've had a chance to get to know the U.S. better. I've been to sports events like the Timberwolves game against the Cleveland Cavaliers in the Target Center, and I've watched the college football team play. Coming from a nation that likes soccer very much, football is definitely a new experience for me. Carving a pumpkin for Halloween was also something new that I tried and—contrary to my expectations—the result was really pretty.

I'm often asked how I feel about going abroad alone, and what it's like to be "the only German" on campus. I didn't think much about this in advance. But now I see it as a really good way to improve my language skills. However I also enjoy talking to people here who can speak German or who study that language.

All in all, studying at Augsburg is a great experience. I think I already have a good impression of the U.S. as a whole and of Augsburg College in particular.

But the semester isn't over yet, and I'm curious about the coming weeks!

