

**Exchange university**

University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign

Degree programme

Master Sustainable Urban Planning and Design

Immersion in an American Campus

Before departure

Going to an American University has always raised my interest and I never thought I could have the chance to study there, so when I saw I can do an exchange there, I didn't hesitate. After applying for this exchange program there is a long process before you are ready to go to the USA. Indeed, you first need to apply for a J-1 VISA which can take a bit of time before it is granted. After, you have to make sure you have the required vaccinations to go there, but in case it is possible to do it over there. Even though the documentation process can be a lot, it is totally worth it !

Upon arrival

I first travelled to Chicago and spent a few days there before going to the university which is two/three hours from the city. Chicago is a very vibrant and beautiful city that has a lot to offer, so it is always nice if you have the time to visit. I had the chance to meet with a friend that lives in Chicago that drove me to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which was easier, but otherwise you can take the train or the coach bus to reach campus. The arrival at university is really fun because there are a lot of activities over one week that allows you to get acquainted to the school but also the people around you. There was a welcome event in the Football Stadium of the University, where they introduced us to the University's traditions, chants, values but also sports teams and they made us do a huge "I", the symbol of the University of the stadium's pitch that was quite impressive and from there I knew, the experience will be great.



Financials

Organizing and preparing for this trip can be a bit stressful but there is a lot of guidance and we got to connect with other exchange students from KTH who were also going there which made the process easier. In the ABE school, they do not provide funding for the exchange program but I know other programs from KTH do help financially their students. This exchange was self-funded in my case and I would advise you to plan your budget in advance and anticipate more in case of unplanned events or potential trips in the country.

Accommodation

For my stay, I chose to live in residence halls to have the maximum American experience possible. I was sharing a room with another girl, and we ended up being really good friends, so I was lucky. The accommodation I was at required you to choose a meal plan, this was quite convenient as you don't have to cook, the food is quite diverse, it is rather good, especially breakfast (see down below) ! Other exchange students lived in apartments with roommates which can be a cheaper option than staying on campus.



University and studies

The Campus is very enjoyable, it is walkable, full of green space, nice buildings and scenery but most of all it is huge. You can find nice study spots all over the campus but also many places to grab coffee with a friend. Regarding the academics, I thought that overall all my teachers were very friendly, inspiring and helpful. They are also very passionate about their work and pass on this well to the students, they want their students to succeed and motivate us regularly which I particularly liked because it is not like this in other universities.

Courses

Most of the courses that I took were related to my program which is urban planning. I really liked their approach on the subject and ended up doing a lot of practical activities or even field trips. We went to Chicago twice with one class and got to engage with professionals (see picture below). The list of courses that we can take is quite vast and I recommend going to exchange with elective courses credits available so it can allow you to take fun classes such as ice skating or volleyball.



City and country

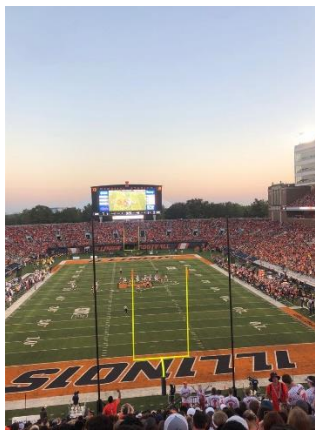
I have been previously to the US and I have always enjoyed it, this time as a student, I got to be immersed more in the culture and got to know more how the country works. I really like that the US is so diverse in terms of landscape but also culture, when you visit big cities such as Chicago or New York you realise how rich in culture some areas are. I got the chance to travel whilst I was on my exchange, I went to NY, which was really impressive and had the best food. I also went to San Francisco, which I

really appreciated the coastline and the beach. Lastly, I visited Utah during Thanksgiving, where I got to experience the full Thanksgiving traditions, had a great time.



Leisure and social activities

On campus, there are so many activities and events happening all the time. At the start of the semester, there was an event called “Quad day” where all the clubs of the university were displayed outside and they introduced their activities and you could choose to join if you like, but the number of clubs was insane. Then, sport events are quite big on campus so I recommend going to some of them. Football games are the biggest events and I got to go for the first time, really fun to experience. I also enjoyed other sports even better such as basketball and gymnastics.



Sustainability

It is quite easy to get around on campus, it is walkable, equipped with cycle lanes and full network of buses that are free for students. Therefore, in terms of transportation, it is quite sustainable, you don't need a car. However, in terms of recycling, or being careful with waste is not their most valuable quality, efforts are being made but still requires a lot of work compare to the recycling facilities on KTH campus for example.

Other recommendations and observations

The campus life is amazing, you will have so much fun and explore many different activities ! Also, it is a great place to be if you are curious of other cultures as there are many cultural houses such as The American Asian house, where you get to know some new traditions and try great food.