In a few sentences my overall experience was remarkable and unforgettable. I have made connections with cultures and people from throughout my own country and across the world. Beyond all of the differences and comparing and contrasting, I first hand experienced how two people from different countries and cultures with different norms and expectations can not only find a common ground, but can share a bond much stronger than that of friendship.

**Practical Information**

**Visa/Arrival Information**

Since I was planning on staying over 6 months, I had to get a Residence Permit—which is much more involved and difficult. It took 6 months from the time I first submitted my application to approval.

At the airport, I had no problems. Everything went smoothly. I had not flown in over a decade at this point and so I slowed down at one point, unsure of where to exit & the customs claim put my baggage through an extra scanner machine, but there were no issues.

I think I am one of the few people who was asked for identification randomly while in the city. It was the middle of the day and I was waiting at the subway for a friend and the police officers asked me for ID. I luckily had my passport on me and due to this experience, I suggest everyone carry a copy of their passport on them at ALL times.

**Packing**

What did you not bring from home that you wish you had? More clothes. I packed one 25 kg/50 lb bag for 2 semesters, thinking I could just buy whatever I needed. But I would rather pay $150 for another suitcase because think of how little you can actually purchase with $150, especially if it is something like a winter coat or hiking boots. Oh and you probably need to bring your own Ethernet cord!

What items do you recommend not bringing? I think bed fittings, sheets, blankets, etc. is a waste of weight and space to pack.

**Resources**

Where did you find good information on:

- **The host university:** the host university website is a great place to start. If you have any questions, do not be afraid to email the international office/advisor at your host university.

- Also talk to students at Cornell who have been to your university & students on exchange at Cornell from the university you are going to.

- **Social events:** Facebook had an incredible number of groups, pages and events for Vienna. My host university also sent out a weekly newsletter I recommend reading.

- The program called “Erasmus” is for European exchange students technically, but smart Americans and non-Erasmus students should jump on that bandwagon. Erasmus programs accept any and everyone.

- **Movies/shows/concerts:** Google still works across the ocean. Almost every show, restaurant, place I went had its own website. And if it wasn’t in English, Google translate did a good enough job.

- **Maps/tourist information:** Again, Google maps is wonderful. Also I got a great map (or two or five) from the tourist info in the city center for free. And most cities that have public transport have a public transport website, use it! There is always so much to do and see in a city, I would typically Google the top 10 and then ask someone who had been there, was studying abroad there, or was from there for a few alternative tips.

**International Office at Host University**

- **What type of reception did you have upon arrival?** Open arms & smiles!

- **Did you receive (or were you offered) a buddy?** Yes, I received an awesome buddy, who started helping me the minute I stepped off the plane by waiting there with a sign for me!

- **Were there orientation activities?** Yes, they had Welcome Days and I recommend any pre-start courses or programs (they give you a jump start ahead).

- **How was the international office staff?** Friendly and helpful, if you asked for help.
Academics

The University
Is there a centralized campus?
Yes, there is a main campus and another campus across town.

Where do students hang out?
On campus, Tuewi is the hot spot. The inside has some comfy chairs and when it is nice outside, every picnic table is full. Turkenschanz Park is in the center of the city and is probably 1 of my favorite parks in Vienna. You should definitely hang out there.

Are there accessible computer labs, wifi, libraries, etc?
Yes. There are computer labs in the basement of Exner Haus (the building with the library) and there are several spots that have wifi, but my personal favorite place is the new building: Schwackhofer haus (a pretty glass building) with wifi everywhere and nice study areas with 4 chairs grouped around a table by the window and there are even outlets.

Courses
How was the course enrollment process?
Fairly easy, but my buddy helped me which was great. There is no schedulizer so you have to look at when the classes meet and write it out on a paper to see if your classes conflict. Usually if there are 1 or 2 overlaps it is ok, just be sure to ask the professor in the beginning.

How were the classes structured (mostly lecture? discussions?)?
Most of the classes for my major and interest were seminars, with some discussion. I did not have many large lecture classes at all.

Was homework given? If so, how often? How much?
I rarely had homework. Since I took a lot of seminar classes, instead of homework or a final exam, we had 1 major paper assigned that we worked on throughout the semester.

What types of exams were given? How do they compare to those at Cornell?
I had no prelims or midterms, and I think the exams were easier than Cornell’s.

How are the courses graded? (e.g., flat, curved?)
I think all of my classes were flat, but as a social science major my classes are usually not curved.

On what criteria are grades based? (e.g., tests? papers? group projects?)
For seminars it was mostly based on attendance and a paper. Some classes had a power point group project and an exam.

How many classes did you take?
Since 2 ECTS credits equal 1 US credit, and BOKU’s classes are generally worth less credits, I took about twice as many: 8-10 classes a semester. But they don’t meet all at once. Some meet only 2 days, others meet every day for 1 week and some meet once a week every other week.

Were you allowed to take your exams early? If so, what was the process?
Yes, in the beginning of the semester talk to the professor and tell them you are an exchange student who needs to leave XX date and they should arrange an alternative for you. In some rarer cases, you might not be able to--so ask in the beginning.

Life Abroad

Language
Did you have any language problems with faculty? With other students? In daily life?
Of course language was sometimes a challenge, but it always seemed to work out. Be thankful, everyone knows English! The most challenging though, was when something legal was being dealt with like my residence permit. I needed a translator to help me because the woman assigned to review my application did not seem to want or like English...

Would you recommend taking a language course before departing?
Yes definitely! Learn as much as you can.

Was a “crash course” in the host language offered at the university? Was it useful?
Yes and yes.

Banking
Would you recommend opening a local account? If so, which do you recommend?
Well I opened an account since I was there for a year. But I don’t know if it is actually worth it, definitely not only for a semester. I recommend having a credit/charge card as a safety back up.

If not, how did you do your banking and access money while abroad?
Using an ATM/debit/credit card. There is a fee, but there is also a fee for transferring your money from your home bank account to the new one.

Housing
Did your host university arrange your housing? If not, how did you find housing?
They provide a website/housing program: OeAD.
What type of housing (apartment? home stay? dorm?)? Would you recommend it?
Student apartments. Overall recommend it because finding an alternative is very difficult. But if you are up for the challenge you can find much better and cheaper housing not through the provided organization.

How much did you pay for housing? How did you pay for rent and utilities?
275 Euros a month for a double shared room with a third flat mate in another room. We 3 shared a kitchen (with no oven, only stove top) and a bathroom. No extra extra utility fee, but we paid 18 euros a month for “cleaning” that wasn’t very good.

Where did you eat? Was there a meal plan?
No meal plan. It was up to me to cook for myself. It was a balance between eating out and cooking for myself, occasionally we had dinner parties.

Transportation
What modes of public transportation are available? How much do they cost?
Vienna has a wonderful City Bike program that is free to sign up and is free to use the bike for up to an hour and there is a small fee for any amount of time after that—but if you wait 15 minutes after using it for an hour you get another hour free. The U-bahn or subway, street trams (Strassenbahn) and buses are all great.

How/where do you pay for tickets? Are there monthly or commuter passes?
I bought a semester pass at one of the main stations. Very simple and reliable system.

Communication
How did you call home? What was the cost? Did you use Skype?
Skype is a savior! I hardly ever actually made a normal phone call but it was like $1 a minute maybe? I had a global capable cell phone that I could email home from all the time and felt always connected to home.

Did you buy a cell phone? If so, what type of plan and/or provider do you recommend? I could not find a plan under 2 year contract. So I bought a pay as you go phone for 30 euros and then bought credit weekly for about 10 euros to use it. It was T-mobile and overpriced. If you can find a phone to buy and then buy a sim card through B.o.b, it is much more affordable.

How long does it take to receive mail? To send mail? What is the cost?
It took about 7-10 days to receive mail and besides regular letters/postcards it is quite expensive to mail from the US. A small package is almost $50. However, mailing out of Austria was terrible. I had my package lost and almost not returned, even though I paid extra for insurance they did nothing. It was also expensive. I would not rely on the mail because I sent several postcards from the post office itself (checking postage and everything) and they were never received.

Social activities
Throughout the semester were there any special activities arranged for exchange students?
Yes, there is a weekly gathering called Stammtisch, which I enjoyed. And there are other special holiday events as well.

What do local students do for fun?
Everything from the pub to hiking.

Shopping
Where did you buy groceries, toiletries, house wares, and other items? One of the odd things is most toiletries are in a separate store from the groceries. I liked Spar for groceries and Bipa or DM for toiletries. There was a Disconto (dollar like store) where I bought some houseware items, but there are cheaper shops on the main shopping street, Mariahilfastrasse. I also recommend a trip out to the Ikea. It is on the edge of the city, but worth stocking up on some essentials like cheap Tupperware.

How do the prices compare to the United States? Did you use cash or credit/debit cards?
I had a bank account so I could use my debit card at the store (but it took 3 months to get this card!) Cash is usually best. Prices are a bit higher, but the exchange rate was also very bad when I was there.

Are there outdoor markets? If so, do you recommend them?
Yes yes yes and yes! Naschmarkt is the biggest and runs every day, rain snow or shine except Sundays. And there are smaller ones too. I lived near the Brunnenmarkt.

What are general store hours?
9-7. Don’t expect things to be open late, ever!

What stores are popular? Convenient?
H&M is everywhere! And Europeans consider it “cheaper” whereas in the US you might consider more on the not so cheap end. Tabak shops or “tobacco” shops are on every corner and are much like our gas station convenience stores.

Were there any items that were not available?
Not really, maybe only a few specialty items that you just have to buy a different brand of. Side note: Pandora does not work outside the US.

Health and Safety
How safe did you feel in your host location?
Very!

What advice do you have for future students regarding their health and safety?
After a certain time where I felt comfortable and did not have anything bad happen, I may have been too trusting when
going out at night. Just be careful, go out with friends who you trust. Go to the doctor if you are sick! I started to get a cold, and instead of resting up and taking it easy I kept going, going and ended up needing 3 antibiotics for a whole week before I started to feel better! Take care of yourself!

**What resources were available in case you needed medical attention?**

There is a hospital nearby that I know some friends went to. But there are also doctors that will see non-patients, you just have to search a bit for them. Also the pharmacies, Apotheke, can help you. Don’t be afraid to ask them for help. They can give you cough syrup without a prescription.

**Travel**

*Where did you travel while abroad?*

All over Europe: Venice, Rome, London, Poland (3 cities), Salzburg, Munich, Augsburg, Prague and another small village in Czech Republic and through parts of Croatia (Porec, Pula, Hum, Zagreb), and some areas in Burgenland and Upper Austria, and lastly some small towns in the Province of Tyrol in Austria near Innsbruck.

*Is there a student travel agency or other organization to assist with making travel plans?*

Not really. But there is a student organization: Erasmus for European exchange students (which if I haven’t said yet, become a part of in every way you can!) that plans trips. However, I never went on 1 of their trips and planned my own.

*Did the host university organize any trips?*

Not any big trips, but they did have a few orientation trips to a local winery for example and places in the city. But the university has these courses that are excursions to outside places. Definitely take one! Even if it is not your field of study, go on an excursion, they are amazing!

*How much did you spend on traveling abroad?*

I would say a good couple hundred per couple day trip. But some places are more expensive than others: London vs. Croatia. But the earlier you plan, the cheaper!

*Are there any guidebooks or websites that you would recommend?*

Hostelworld.com is good for finding and reviewing hostels, but in the end go to the actual hostel’s website because Hostel world charges you a (small) deposit fee. Rather than one source as a guidebook, I recommend searching and comparing a variety of websites and asking actual people their suggestions, such as other exchange students you meet or even the international exchange office staff.

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**Overall exchange experience**

*Did you get a good picture of the country? The local and school culture?*

Yes I have a vivid and alive picture of the country, including the local and school culture. Note though that BOKU is a bit of an alternative school culture--but in the best way possible!

*How did the exchange experience affect you from a cultural and social viewpoint?*

I learned a lot about my own culture and see things about American life I did not before. It opens your eyes and helps you see through a clearer lens. I feel more socially confident. I am able to interact with people from around the world.

*What influence do you think the experience had/will have over future career possibilities?*

I discovered career options I never would have thought about. I have experience not only with international material, students, professors, but at a Masters level. Many people were a few years older as students and working on their Masters. I believe I am a more relaxed person about my future and see more possibilities than ever before. I do not feel rushed to follow any certain societal path of achievements, but rather take my time to enjoy the wonders of learning and figuring out exactly what I want to do with my life. I am ready to make the mistakes that will lead me to my own personal success.