



FU/BEST PROGRAM

**Semester/Academic Year in
Berlin**

Program Guide

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WELCOME from the Academic Director

Dear FU-BEST participant, dear parents/guardians, dear institutional partners:

Welcome to the Berlin European Studies Program, brought to you by Freie Universität Berlin! We are excited to offer you background information on our program, which offers a stimulating and rewarding experience in one of Europe's most fascinating cities.

Berlin is a wonderful city in which to live and study, with countless historical, political, economic, and cultural features and sites that await exploration. It is a city still undergoing a dramatic transformation, ever since the notorious Berlin Wall's demise in 1989, Germany's reunification in 1990, and the parliament's decision in 1991 to re-locate itself and most of the government from Bonn to Berlin by the turn of the century. The city is bustling not only with politicians, civil servants, and interest groups, but also with countless people attracted to Berlin's unique cultural vibrancy. Many construction cranes still dot Berlin's skyline, as a dizzying array of often striking architectural projects continue to transform the city's physical profile. Berlin is also a fascinating "hinge-city", located strategically on the former dividing line between east and west in Europe and subject to multiple cultural influences as a result.

Freie Universität Berlin, founded in 1948 with considerable U.S. support, is located in the southwest of the city, in the former "West-Berlin". It is here that our program has its academic home. Utilizing the city's superb public transportation network, participants (and their guests!) will be able to explore both Berlin and the surrounding area (the state of Brandenburg) to the fullest.

This Program Guide is meant to be a wide-ranging resource for the semester in Berlin, with information relevant to our three key "audiences": participants, their parents/guardians, and their home institutions. Most of the material is formulated with all three of these audiences in mind, but some of it is addressed to a specific "audience" in particular. We extend a special invitation to parents/guardians to explore the information offered in the pages that follow. In addition to this Guide, we also wish to call attention to our *Academic Regulations & Code of Conduct* and to our *General Terms and Conditions of Business*, both of which are posted on our website (www.fubest.org).

We hope that you will find our Program Guide useful. If questions remain, feel free to contact us.

All the "BEST",

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Academic Director

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Part I: PROGRAM BASICS

1. FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN and the FU-BEST PROGRAM

Freie Universität Berlin (FUB) is a premier destination for research and education in Europe. It was founded in December 1948 with the support of U.S. officials and Berlin politicians by students and scholars as a response to the persecution of students critical of the system at Universität Unter den Linden (today Humboldt Universität) in the Soviet sector of the divided city of Berlin. These students and scholars wanted to study and carry out research at Freie Universität, free of political influence. To this day, Freie Universität Berlin is attractive to students because of its support of a libertarian ideal of education, marked by unfettered research and discussion of ideas and knowledge in order to form autonomous conclusions, opinions, and new ideas. Accordingly, the overall academic atmosphere at Freie Universität features lots of student activities and organizations. In comparison to many other academic institutions or systems, Freie Universität Berlin is marked by a rather individualized and self-reliant approach to planning and conducting one's own studies. The university's infrastructure features 15 broadly conceived departments and central institutes offering over 100 programs in all academic disciplines, except engineering. As an institution that highly values a free exchange of ideas, it offers a particularly supportive environment for innovative research and development projects.

The greatest strength of Freie Universität Berlin and a key component of its high national and international reputation are its achievements and offerings in the humanities and the social sciences. Specialized centers for interdisciplinary area studies or particular and rare subjects further contribute to the excellent quality and reputation of the university. Freie Universität Berlin is ranked nationally and internationally among the top research universities in Germany.

The different components of the university campus, which is the intellectual home of approximately 33,000 students, are located throughout the charming and mostly residential southwest area of Berlin. Yet – thanks to Berlin's superb public transportation network – it is within easy reach of the city's downtown areas. The campus areas, like those of the other universities in Berlin, are fully integrated into the city's setting and therefore take advantage of existing infrastructural offerings outside the university.

Exchange programs for students have played an important role at Freie Universität Berlin from the very beginning. In the 1950s, Freie Universität Berlin had already established partnerships with leading American universities such as Stanford, Princeton, and Columbia, as well as with Western European universities. First contacts with universities in Eastern Europe were made in the 1960s. In particular in the 1990s, links were extended to include growing numbers of institutions in North America, Eastern Europe, and the Far East. Today, the university has over 160 partnerships worldwide and over 300 in the ERASMUS program, aside from hundreds of smaller partnerships pursued by its individual academic departments. It has set up liaison offices at a variety of overseas locations. Since 1998, the university has offered a growing and successful International Summer and Winter University as well (www.fubis.org). The creation

of the FU-BEST program in 2005 thus continued **a tradition of internationalism** at Freie Universität Berlin.

Based on the international tradition of Freie Universität Berlin sketched above, the **mission statement of the FU-BEST program** is as follows:

Freie Universität Berlin European Studies Program (FU-BEST) seeks to educate responsible, global citizens by promoting intercultural exposure in a multi-faceted environment. The program aims to provide an intensive and diverse study abroad experience to its participants. Combining mandatory German language instruction and a varied menu of content courses taught in English and German, FU-BEST is intended to be an accessible opportunity to a wide range of potential participants. Using its concept of “extended classroom”, the program’s goal is to link high-quality academic instruction with a broader international experience, encompassing elements of culture, society, history, and politics, in Berlin, in Germany, and in (Central) Europe generally. Small classes and the availability of day-to-day guidance and support are designed to enable students to make the most of a unique educational opportunity.

The program is conceived as **a semester-based opportunity for students drawn primarily from North American institutions**, combining the strong institutional foundation of Freie Universität Berlin with resources available in the German capital. FU-BEST provides students who are not advanced enough in their command of the German language for direct-enrollment options the possibility of gaining insight into an important European society through English-taught courses. Utilization of the **North American semester calendar**, rather than the German academic schedule, makes the program easily accessible for students from North America. The program is thus a stand-alone feature in the curriculum of Freie Universität Berlin, not based on direct enrollment in the university’s regular semesters, offering its own range of content courses, taught primarily but not exclusively in English.

Although knowledge of German is not a prerequisite for admission to the program (thus further enhancing its accessibility to a broad range of interested students), all participants are required to enroll in German language instruction on-site.

In addition to its specific academic offerings and features, the FU-BEST program aims to supply its participants with **a comprehensive intellectual and intercultural experience**, pursued by means of a variety of activities (excursions, field-trips, field projects, social and cultural opportunities, etc.). The study abroad experience provided by the program unfolds simultaneously on several levels: in the classroom, on campus, in the city, in Germany, and even on a more (Central) European level. Students are encouraged to reflect on their own culture, learning as much about themselves and their own society as they do about Berlin, Germany and/or Europe.

2. APPLICATION & COURSE SELECTION

Two essential pre-application documents are the program's [General Terms and Conditions of Business](#) and [Academic Regulations and Code of Conduct](#). Both documents are available on our website: www.fubest.org. In applying to the program, participants accept the contents of these documents. When submitting an application, it is important to note carefully all instructions provided on our website, so that the FU-BEST experience is off to a smooth start.

Participants should be familiar with all information and regulations at their own university or college regarding academic registration, beyond the paperwork that is completed and submitted to the FU-BEST office.

As part of the application form, students are required to rank at least 20 of our subject courses in order of preference. Once a complete file has reached our office, it is then officially “logged into” our system. We conduct **course enrollment on a first-come-first-enrolled basis**, and operate with enrollment limits of 20 students per subject course. Subject courses are offered in a total of 8 “blocks” during Monday through Thursday, whereby each course meets once a week for 2.5 hours. In each block, at least three courses are offered simultaneously. Please see the course registration page in the application form for details. At the start of November (in case of Spring semester) or April (in case of Fall semester), participants are notified in their formal admission letter via e-mail about the courses in which they have been enrolled.

Participants will have the customary **drop/add options during the first week of the program** in Berlin, but should remember that switching courses in an overseas setting like Berlin is more complicated and at times simply impossible. It is also important to keep in mind that changes in course enrollment will usually require obtaining prior long-distance approval of such a changed course schedule from officials back home.

It is essential to mark the proper German language section on the application form, especially if some German language courses were already completed at the home institution. It is usually best to consult with a German language teacher back home in case of prior enrollment in German, so that all can be sure that the proper section on the form is marked. As always, **communication with advisors back home** is important. However, please also note that, unless a participant is a complete beginner in German, he/she will be tested by means of an **online placement test** prior to the semester's start in order to ensure that they end up in the proper language section. In addition, a **brief placement interview** is carried out on-site on the first of classes. So the language section marked on the application form is not necessarily the section to which the placement test result assigns a student in the end.

3. PROGRAM STRUCTURE

As noted above, classes meet on a Monday-through-Thursday schedule. German language is taught in the mornings, with subject courses scheduled in the afternoons. Participants should not make any independent travel plans until they know for sure when the various mandatory elements of the program are scheduled.

Each semester, all students not only participate in a week-long off-site excursion (see below), but also visit at least one of three sites in and around Berlin on selected Fridays as an integral and mandatory part of the overall academic program: the Chancellor's Office (Bundeskanzleramt), the site of the former Nazi concentration camp at Sachsenhausen, and the former prison complex in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen of East Germany's state security police (Stasi).

A week-long excursion to Warsaw, Munich, Vienna, Nuremberg, Dresden, Prague, Hamburg, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Brussels, Luxembourg or other destinations (varying from semester to semester) forms an integral part of each semester. Details for a particular semester are made available to participants at the time of admission.

All textbooks, course readers etc., which participants receive on site, are included in the Program Fee. Barring unforeseen circumstances, all classes are held in the same location: Haus L (second floor) on the Lankwitz section of the FUB campus (Malteserstraße 74-100), with the offices located there in Haus S. Participants are registered as students at Freie Universität, which entails access to and use of university facilities. The FU-BEST and the regular FUB semesters (the latter do not run on the North American schedule) usually only overlap for 6 or 8 weeks (depending on fall or spring semester), and FU-BEST participants will notice that German students will not be as present on the Lankwitz campus for a period of multiple weeks, as a result of the German semester break.

Please note: Participants should not book departing flights prior to the day after the Farewell Dinner since this would most likely conflict with final exam schedules.

4. STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

The FU-BEST program is an academic program, involving an academic community. Although we recognize the importance and attractiveness of personal travel in Europe during the program, **academic obligations will always come first in this program. Class attendance and participation in field-trips and excursions are mandatory.** As students in this community, participants can expect to be treated as adults but are also expected to behave as adults, respecting the rights of fellow students, staff, faculty, and all individuals with whom they come in contact. Participants are guests of Freie Universität Berlin, enjoying the status of visiting students. It is thus essential to exercise due respect for the property of Freie Universität and for the rights of all individuals whom one encounters.

Participants should keep in mind at all times that they are residing in a foreign country. They are subject to the same laws that apply to all residents of Germany and **not** to the laws of their home country. As noted above, familiarizing oneself with our [Academic Regulations and Code of Conduct](#) is a smart thing to do.

With respect to students' private life, FU-BEST is neither eager nor able to regiment their behavior. Participants are free to exercise their own judgment, drawing upon their own values in the personal choices that confront all of us as adults. However, the personal choices that

are made could have a negative impact on others and tarnish the reputation of our academic community as a whole. FU-BEST staff wants all participants to take full advantage of all the opportunities offered in this great city, but at the same time we remind students to always employ wisdom and discretion in their personal conduct.

Part II:

PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION AND ADVICE

5. BEFORE LEAVING FOR GERMANY

This section of the Program Guide encompasses essential advice on how to prepare, what to bring, what to expect, and some important on-site matters. Note that it is addressed primarily and directly to the participants, but parents/guardians will likely find its contents quite useful as well.

Dear participants: Our first advice is to keep an open mind and a sense of humor as you embark on your intercultural adventure. Basically, your experience will be what you make of it – try to make it as German as you can. Be brave enough to reach beyond your own country’s customs and creature comforts as you explore the rich culture and beauty of this exciting and changing city.

We do not need to convince you of the benefits of study abroad, nor do we want to “map out” your semester in this guide. Your semester abroad will be your own unique experience to discover. In writing this guide, our aim is to provide you with pre-departure information geared toward preparing you for an adventure of a lifetime. Read through this guide carefully, making the most of all the information and advice it offers. Feel free to review it, of course, with your parents/guardians or anyone else who assists you during the pre-program phase.

One of the biggest regrets that many study abroad students have is their lack of research and preparation before departure. Your study abroad experience is an investment in your education, time away from loved ones, as well as your future. As the weeks draw closer to your departure, think about preparing your mind for the journey, as well as your suitcase. A few hours spent researching the history and culture of your host country will pay off in a few short weeks, we promise! The more you prepare now, the better adjusted you will be when you arrive, and the more you will learn about your host culture and yourself. [At the end of this guide is a short list of suggested reading and viewing.](#)

For many students, this semester abroad will be their first opportunity to live and travel in another country. You will soon notice the distinction between “living” abroad and “traveling”. If you have left your home country before for a short trip, you will have already had an experience in making yourself understood in a different language or in navigating around an unfamiliar city. As you live in Berlin for the semester, however, you will get the insider view on German culture through trips to the post office, the local *Spätkauf*, little towns nearby, the hair dresser’s, the doctor’s office, etc. It can be frustrating at times to leave your comfort zone linguistically and culturally. It is difficult to navigate German systems when public transportation is delayed and crowded and when bureaucracy at the post office or train station seems to be incomprehensible. There are many benefits to a long-term stay abroad. During your time abroad, you will develop a routine, get to know the city, and even be equipped to give tourists directions. The challenge is learning to adapt. The reward is learning a new culture, and learning about your own culture.

Your semester will be both a joy and a challenge. FU-BEST aims for it to be an excellent learning experience. Our advice to you is that you keep an open mind and learn to be flexible. Germany is a beautiful country bursting with cultural and historical riches. Take advantage of the opportunity to live abroad, and make a big effort to “do as the Germans do”.

Begin preparing yourself for the fact that things are going to be different in Germany. Some things in your daily life are going to be “better” than at home and some are going to be “worse”. You will miss some things that you like, but you will also come to like new things that you can have in Germany/Europe that you cannot find back home. Keep in mind that you are the guest and it is up to you to conform to the customs and living habits in Germany/Europe. You may have to modify your expectations about the lifestyles, habits, and customs of Europeans. You will certainly encounter frustrations and you will go through an adjustment period. But that is part of what this experience is all about, and you will become a better person as a result.

Key schedule information: Please note the **official starting date for each semester**, as communicated to you once you have been accepted into the program: you must be on-site in Berlin no later than this day! If you travel to Berlin from North America, remember that your arrival in Berlin would typically be one day after you left the U.S./Canada. Several weeks prior to the start of the program, you will receive instructions regarding the check-in process on that official starting day, including directions to the building where the check-in takes place (those directions can then also be shared with taxi drivers, for example). **Apartment students:** you will have the additional option of moving into your apartment one day before the official starting date; information on that will be sent to you prior to the start of the program. The apartments are located ca. 50-60 minutes from the program site. **Homestay students:** on the starting day of the program (and not earlier), you will be picked up by your host-family after you have formally checked into the program. Most host-families will tend to be located 30-45 minutes from Freie Universität by public transportation. If you set up your own housing, you are thereby also assuming responsibility for your own moving-in and local transfer to your chosen place of residence. Before classes start, your check-in will first be followed by several important **Orientation Days**.

As you prepare for departure to Berlin, make good use of the [“Quick checklist”](#) provided in this Program Guide in section 9! And please remember: always consult the program’s website with its extensive information – www.fubest.org.

Along with your admission letter, you will be sent a copy of the Masterschedule for the semester. **Key elements in the Masterschedule** are the Orientation Days, Welcome Reception, the week-long excursion, the one-week mid-semester break, midterms and finals weeks, and the Farewell Dinner. Please note **the starting and ending dates of the semester as listed in the Masterschedule** and communicated to you. Those in homestays might be able to stay with their host(s) a bit beyond the formal end of the program, but that should be cleared with the host(s) in a timely and diplomatic manner!

6. PERSONAL BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

The information in this section should be of use both before and during the semester in Berlin, so participants may wish to return to it after they have settled into the FU-BEST program as well. Parents/guardians will also find the information helpful.

Credit cards are not (yet) used in Germany nearly as widely as in the U.S. and some other countries. **Many** establishments will only take cash. It is always best to ask if credit cards are accepted before making purchases to avoid embarrassing situations. Large department stores generally take credit cards. The technological standard outside the US are contactless EMV credit cards secured with a PIN (“Chip and PIN”) while most banks in the US rely on a signature (“Chip and Signature”). Ask your bank whether you will encounter any issues in Europe or Germany with the credit card you currently have.

To obtain cash, one is normally able to use an ATM card from one’s own home bank. Avoid making cash withdrawals with a credit card, since the fee and interest rates tend to be very high. Traveler’s checks have all but disappeared. Furthermore, one can buy Euros at many banks, at change bureaus (*Wechselstuben*), or even at large department stores. Commissions are fairly standard, so no need to spend much time shopping around. Banks will usually advance cash on major credit cards, such as VISA or MasterCard, but, as noted, this involves considerable fees.

Being prepared for a financial emergency: Participants and parents/guardians should keep a copy of credit card numbers and the phone numbers to cancel cards in case they are lost or stolen. Students should keep this information separate from their wallet. Participants and their parents/guardians should (prior to departure) discuss ways to access funds in case of emergency (incl. loss of credit cards) via money wire or other means.

Unless one has a larger number of regular bills that need to be paid to someone in Germany, **students will generally not need to open a bank account.** Personal checks, as Americans know them, are virtually nonexistent.

Prices in Germany are generally comparable to or even, for many items, slightly below U.S. prices. As for other countries, we cannot give general indicators here. In the end, it is always difficult to generalize about these matters. A standard budget during a semester at home may suit a student generally well in Germany, but if any significant personal travel and related expenses (souvenirs, concerts, etc.) are added, additional financial resources may be needed.

Movies seen Thursday through Sunday cost about 8 Euros. Monday through Wednesday are the popular nights, as admission is often only about 5 Euros (note that prices may vary among movie theaters). Movies in English are designated OV or OmU (with subtitles). There are discounts available for opera and theater shows. For example, all unsold tickets for any opera at the Komische Oper can be purchased after 12 noon on the day of the performance at half the normal price. Student tickets at the Staatsoper, available right before the performance, cost about 10 Euros.

In conclusion, when it comes to personal finances, budget realistically. Many students will almost certainly spend more than during a normal semester back home but even their means will have some limit. This is particularly important when planning independent travel: aside from the program's academic obligations, which would interfere with unlimited travel (especially during weekends), keep a realistic eye on your "financial well" and do not let it run dry early during the semester!

7. PASSPORT AND IMMIGRATION ISSUES

In order to enter Germany for the program at Freie Universität Berlin, participants have to have a passport valid for more than 6 months (even better: 1 year) after arrival in Germany. A passport is needed for every official activity or procedure, like the registration at the local Berlin Registration Office or *Bürgeramt* (known as *Anmeldung* – we will do this on-site) or the acquisition of the mandatory residency permit (see below).

Important immigration notice: Participants who are not a citizen of an EU member country, the USA or Canada will almost certainly need a visa in order to enter Germany and participate in the FU-BEST program. It is their personal responsibility to obtain such a visa, using the admission letter we provide via e-mail and adding proof of their ability to pay for their stay in Germany. Be sure to take care of this matter in a timely manner! **Again, U.S. citizens do not need a visa in order to enter Germany.**

If a visa has to be acquired in order to enter Germany, it is best to apply for it as soon as our letter of admission has been issued, since the process can take time and it will be impossible to depart for Germany without a visa! The application must be filed at the German Embassy or a German Consulate in the country of study, NOT in one's home country, in case there is a difference here.

All non-EU participants will be required to apply for a **residency permit** (*Aufenthaltstitel*) that extends the customary 3-month limit on stays by visitors; this permit is issued by the Office for Foreign Residents (*Ausländerbehörde*) in Berlin; the relevant forms will be completed on-site.

Please note: if you are planning on spending more than one consecutive month in the European Union before the start of the program, you will have to apply for a residency permit on your own! In that case, please contact our office well in advance to inquire about any steps you have to take care of pre-semester.

8. HEALTH INSURANCE & MEDICAL ISSUES

Please be sure to check our homepage for any updated health- and safety-related information, for example regarding the COVID19 pandemic: <https://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/fubest/health-and-safety/index.html>.

FU-BEST provides all participants with a German insurance package that combines health, accident and liability insurance and is issued and managed by *Klemmer International*. Customarily, however, participants retain their insurance coverage from back home simultaneously. The insurance issued via the program covers treatment resulting from acute illness and accidents that occur within the European Union. Pre-existing conditions are not covered (this means conditions, both physical and mental, that existed prior to participation, or illness resulting from accidents that occurred prior to FU-BEST). At the start of the program students will be provided with detailed information on their coverage and will be asked to carefully familiarize themselves with it. Additionally, they will be given a personalized certificate for medical treatment that they are required to show to the doctor/dentist when visiting one during the semester. We suggest that students keep this form on them at all times.

When treatment is received in Berlin, in most cases an invoice will either be sent directly to the German health insurance provider or given to the student. Some doctors might expect payment at the time of service with most of them not accepting credit cards (upon payment, the participant will receive a receipt that we will later use in order to arrange reimbursement). Most consultations might run between 25 and 75 Euros during office hours. In any case of illness, it is important to remain in close contact with the FU-BEST team so that we can insure a smooth process.

Upon arrival at the FU-BEST program site, all participants receive an emergency card with relevant information, for medical/dental/psychological as well as financial, legal, or personal emergency situations. This card is an essential resource and should be carried by each participant at all times.

Please note the following information regarding medication and prescriptions carefully:

The law on prescriptions in Germany is rather strict. Many types of medicine that can be purchased over the counter back home, such as antibiotics, must be prescribed by a doctor in Germany. A participant with a regular prescription should be aware that German doctors might not be able to fill it in Germany, often due to the reason that pharmacies (*Apotheken*) may not carry the same brands of medicine one might find at home. If medication is taken regularly, it is suggested that all current prescriptions be filled for the length of time spent in Germany. Necessary medication can usually be imported in small amounts, unless it is considered an illegal substance in Germany. Participants should check with their doctor well before departing for Berlin, bring along a letter that documents the relevant diagnosis and treatment back home, and also discuss possible alternative prescriptions with their physician prior to departure. In any case, medication should be transported in its original container and ideally with an explanatory note from the doctor back home.

Please do NOT arrange for medication to be sent from overseas should supplies run low. We have had cases where students were charged with drug dealing by German police, because the medication sent to them (by parents or others) was illegal in Germany.

Those who wear glasses and/or contact lenses should be sure to bring along a copy of their prescription(s), in case this is needed.

Health is a major concern for most travelers. It can be difficult to deal with medical problems in a different country because of differences in medications as well as the medical system. The Lonely Planet website has a section devoted to health (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/germany/health> and <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/germany/berlin/health>) with information for pre-departure measures that you can take as well as how to deal with any health issues that may arise while abroad.

There is at least one *Apotheke* open 24 hours every day in each neighborhood.

Berlin has three major university hospital centers, including Universitätsklinikum Benjamin Franklin in the Steglitz area, located at Hindenburgdamm 30. It provides quality medical care in every field.

For psychological help, there is an American Hotline (0177-8141510). This is an outreach service for English-speakers offering emergency help 24 hours a day. Additional information on **English-speaking counselors** is also listed on the emergency card distributed upon arrival during check-in.

In case of psychological counseling, participants can also turn to the following website at Freie Universität Berlin:

https://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/studienberatung/psychologische_beratung/index.html.

9. PACKING ADVICE AND CHECKLIST

Please pack all important documents, including passport, travel documents, and program contact information in carry-on luggage. It is also a good idea to pack one change of clothes in the carry-on item. Please mark all luggage with both home and FU-BEST program office contact information. Travelers are generally allowed to take one carry-on bag on board, either a backpack that will fit under the seat or a larger bag that will fit in the over-head compartment. Check with the particular airline for details that may deviate from this widespread practice, however.

It is best NOT to plan having a lot of stuff, such as clothing, sent to Germany through the mail, since many students have faced unpleasant bills from German customs officials. Just be realistic about what is needed and about what can/should be brought along.

Know that forgetting something is not the end of the world. There is little that one cannot find in Berlin. Pack an umbrella and rain gear, and clothing for variable seasonal conditions as well as for occasions such as concerts or opera. Do not forget any medical prescriptions and related documentation (see section 8 above). Toiletry brands may differ from those back home, so you may want to pack your own.

110-volt U.S. appliances need a transformer in order to use 220-volt German/European current. An adaptor is needed as well to make the plug fit. It may be just as easy to buy a hair dryer in Berlin. Clocks and other appliances which require 60-cycle current will not function

properly even with a transformer. We suggest bringing a battery-powered clock to be on the safe side. In most cases, a laptop will only need an adaptor.

Quick checklist

- valid passport (required); visa (if needed). Make photocopies of passport and other important documents (visa, plane tickets, etc.) and put them in carry-on luggage.
- health/accident insurance card.
- credit card (Master/VISA) and/or debit card (Maestro/EC). See information on financial matters under no. 6 above.
- mark all baggage with the home address as well as with the address of the program: FU-BEST, Haus S, Malteserstraße 74-100, 12249 Berlin, Germany.
- pack some clothes into the carry-on luggage in case a suitcase gets lost.
- ISIC card (recommended). Check with the study abroad office on campus regarding nearest availability.
- prescriptions (eye and medical); extra medication (recommended).
- electrical transformer/adaptors: see information above.
- personal laptop computer.
- Berlin book (e.g. Lonely Planet Travel Guides or Let's Go series).

Clothing

As for clothes, participants can relax, because pretty much anything goes in Berlin. Many districts or even neighborhoods tend to have their own specific style. Berlin is big on its unique street wear, which is characterized usually by its rather leisurely nature. Some districts are characterized by a more sophisticated clothing style whereas it is very relaxed in others.

Clothes for going out tend to vary based on the occasion: jeans to some bars, dressier wear to others. There will be occasions where one will want to be more “formal” (opera, theater, museums, holiday events, etc.).

Keep in mind that you will be coming to Berlin in the fall and staying through the early winter (Fall semester) or in winter and staying into spring (Spring semester). Bring appropriate clothing to match the semester(s) in which you are participating. Also, it is important that you think about bringing versatile clothing that can be mixed-and-matched with each other. This is especially good for when you go on trips and only have room for a few outfits in your backpack or suitcase.

Check out the weather in Berlin by going to www.wetter.com or www.dwd.de. For those who are “Celsius-challenged”, temperature conversions are available at: <http://www.online-conversion.com/temperature.htm> or: <http://www.convert-me.com/en/>.

10. POST-BERLIN REGISTRATION & HOUSING?

Thinking about the next semester/quarter back home after the FU-BEST experience is, of course, something most participants may want to do before departing for Europe. Although

this is by and large beyond the responsibility of FU-BEST, some words of advice may yet come in handy.

Registration materials for the “post-Berlin” semester/quarter back home can be sent to the Berlin office by the home college or university, but nowadays it is customary at most schools for registration to be taken care of via internet. Students should check with the appropriate office back home to find out what procedure(s) will be followed. We suggest meeting with academic advisors prior to departure to Germany to discuss course schedule and selection matters for the next term on the home campus.

In addition, participants may want to consider taking care of any required **pre-departure housing matters** for the “post-Berlin” semester/quarter as well.

11. ASPECTS OF THE INTERCULTURAL EXPERIENCE

Among the most important aspects of study abroad is the intercultural experience. Most FU-BEST participants tend to come from North America, and the cultural “gap” between that part of the world and Germany is in many respects not very large. Nonetheless, there are differences, and experiencing and reflecting on similarities as well as differences will hopefully be an integral part of the time spent in Berlin and beyond.

As noted in section 5, we suggest exploring some of the socio-cultural aspects of life in Germany in more detail before taking off for Berlin. We can recommend a few useful resources that have appeared in recent years:

- When in Germany, Do as the Germans Do: The Clued-In Guide to German Life, Language, and Culture by Hyde Flippo (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2018)
- *Cultural Information – Germany* | Centre of Intercultural Learning
https://www.international.gc.ca/cil-cai/country_insights-apercus_pays/ci-ic_de.aspx?lang=eng
- *Life Swap*. Animated Miniseries from the Goethe Institute, New Zealand
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqG-VKS5cezLwZPX8hR1sbw>
- *Germany: Unraveling an Enigma* by Greg Nees (Boston: Intercultural Press, 2000)
https://germanstories.vcu.edu/grmn_320/nees/Germany-Unraveling-an-Enigma.pdf
- *These Strange German Ways and the Whys of the Ways* by Susan Stern (Berlin: Atlantik-Brücke e.V., 2000)
- *The Xenophobe’s Guide to The Germans* by Stefan Zeidenitz and Ben Barkow (London: Oval Books, 2008) (This booklet is a very tongue-in-cheek British view...)

As with any socio-cultural information, it should be used with care and a sense of perspective, in order to avoid slipping into misleading generalizations or stereotyping. In the end, the information provided here and in the resources mentioned is meant to be suggestive, leaving every participant’s own experience as the most decisive, conclusive element.

Part III: THE SEMESTER IN BERLIN: ON-SITE MATTERS

Please note: all participants receive a Student Handbook upon arrival and check-in into the program, which incorporates and expands on information contained in this Program Guide. The Handbook is intended for day-to-day use on-site.

12. ARRIVAL INSTRUCTIONS

Participants are expected to arrive in Berlin no later than the official starting date, as communicated upon admission, and should provide contact and travel information to the FU-BEST office in Berlin by e-mail in a timely manner, so that we can e-mail any updated information regarding arrival procedures, if needed. Failure to do so may complicate the arrival and check-in process in Berlin. Berlin has a first-rate and easy-to-use public transportation system. Since experience shows that students arrive at strongly varying times, **please note that participants will not be picked up at the airport or train station. Instead, they are expected to use public transportation or a taxi to come to the program office at Freie Universität on the starting/check-in day (the same applies if they arrive a day earlier in order to check into a program-managed apartment).** Participants using air transportation will arrive at Berlin-Brandenburg International Airport. Those coming to Berlin from elsewhere in Germany or Europe by train will generally arrive at Berlin Hauptbahnhof (central station).

On the official starting day of the program, participants must first go to the program site at Freie Universität, where they are officially checked in to the program and will then be met by the host-family, if this housing option was selected. Pick-up by host-families is in the course of the afternoon. **Apartment students** will have the additional option of moving into their apartment one day before the official starting date; information on that procedure will be sent out prior to the start of the program. The apartments are located about 50-60 minutes from the program site. Those who opted for non-program housing are, like those in program apartments, responsible for their own transfer to their chosen place of residence. As part of the check-in process, as noted above, participants will receive the FU-BEST Student Handbook, which includes a program for the Orientation Days that follow.

If, upon arrival at the airport, pieces of luggage are missing, the participant should provide the contact number of FU-BEST Academic Director Dirk Verheyen (number of contact: 0163-5525130) to the baggage office at the airport, unless there already is another local number available (homestay phone or the participant's own German-style cell phone).

If temporary housing is needed before the official starting date, do not leave for Germany without first making a temporary lodging reservation. One night's stay (including breakfast) costs about 30 Euros at a youth hostel. **Please note that neither program apartments nor homestays are available prior to the official, respective check-in day.**

We recommend the following link to find a hostel: <http://www.hostels.com/berlin/>.

DIRECTIONS:

As pointed out above, **FU-BEST is located at the FU campus section at Malteserstraße 74-100, 12249 Berlin.** Bus line X 83 runs through the Malteserstraße; the stop to use for this campus section is “Emmichstraße”. The program’s offices are located in Haus S (a yellow-colored villa on the edge of Malteserstraße), but **check-in on the official arrival day** (as announced upon admission to the program) **is at Haus L** (a modern building with 6 floors). It is most advisable to take a taxi from the airport or the train station to the Lankwitz campus site, since the trajectory would be a bit complicated by means of public transportation (and one is probably also carrying plenty of luggage...); the cost would normally be 30+ Euros. **Please note:** on the official arrival day, check-in concludes at 5 p.m., so that anyone who will not make it to the program site until then that day should plan on finding lodging for the first night and check into the program **at Haus S** at 9 a.m. the following day.

Key contact information: The FU-BEST office can be reached at +49 30 838 56 582, +49 30 838 575 87 or +49 30 838 51 018. Academic Director Dirk Verheyen’s mobile number is 0163 552 51 30, if dialled inside Germany, or +49 163 552 51 30, if dialled from outside Germany. In the U.S., add 011 in front of the 49; in other parts of Europe, add 00 in front of the 49.

13. HOUSING IN BERLIN

FU-BEST students are given the choice of opting for housing provided by the program: **either single-occupancy at the Student Village, The Social Hub (formerly The Student Hotel) or homestays.** Every semester we also have a few students who decide to find a semester-long accommodation in Berlin independently. However, this independence comes with more responsibilities on the student’s side.

The Student Village and The Social Hub option available to students is not comparable to the type of dormitory housing participants from the U.S. might know from their home universities. Freie Universität Berlin does not own any accommodation, and the accommodation used by FU-BEST is not in close proximity to the Lankwitz campus. FU-BEST participants living there are considered regular and independent tenants, living in single occupancy on their own.

Students choosing a homestay will ideally have a communicative and enhancing language learning experience involving the person or people with whom they are living. Please keep in mind that the homestay host could be anything from a family of five to a single-person household, and it is therefore important that students be curious and open to meeting and living with locals who have different backgrounds. FU-BEST participants are usually very happy with their homestays and describe their experiences as valuable and overall positive.

FU-BEST housing, whether in the Student Village, The Social Hub or in a homestay, entails commuting to campus. Berliners are urban commuters: whether they rely on public transportation or take the car to get to places, the commute within Berlin is inevitably time-consuming for everyone on a daily basis. Getting to the Lankwitz campus may also take a while,

especially depending on where one lives. All students in Berlin are by definition commuter students.

To provide a better and more precise idea of commuting time, and what that means for personal time management: Getting somewhere in under 30 minutes in Berlin is considered fairly quick and close-by; planning to get from door to door in 30-45 minutes is normal. Taking 50-60 minutes to get to your final destination is considered a more extensive commute, but it rarely takes more than an hour to get anywhere inside the city's borders.

Please note: Please be aware that you are required to pay a 200 Euro security deposit in cash upon your check-in at the Student Village.

14. FOOD & MEALS

Mensa is the name of the standard German **university's food service**. During weekdays, students will have daily access to the Mensa. The meals there are truly inexpensive, and there are many choices, including vegetarian, vegan, salad bar, desserts, and sweets. A warm meal costs between 1.30 and 3.00 Euros. Participants will receive a meal card for this facility during the Orientation Days and can put money on it as time goes by.

Homestay vs. Student Village/ The Social Hub (formerly The Student Hotel) meals: as part of the homestay option, students will receive breakfast and dinner there. Those in the Student Village/ The Social Hub or independently arranged housing, are, of course, fully responsible for their own meals. The Student Village/ The Social Hub feature a shared kitchen.

Please note that breakfast is provided by the program during the week-long excursion, but lunch and dinner are, with rare exceptions, considered a personal expense during those days.

Upon arrival and check-in into the program, participants receive a FU-BEST Student Handbook that, among other things, contains many tips regarding restaurants, going out in the evening, etc. We encourage all to make use of this as much as possible.

15. LIVING IN BERLIN

Berlin is a great place to spend a semester or two. It is a large and exciting city with interesting ethnic neighborhoods, any lifestyle one could wish for, and a great nightlife. Popular areas are for instance Kreuzberg and Neukölln, with a large Turkish population. Students will also find neighborhoods, particularly those in the former East, which are distinctly Berlin (for example, Prenzlauer Berg, around Käthe-Kollwitz-Platz). Building cranes still dominate parts of the landscape and are a constant reminder of the historic changes underway in the city. In many ways it is a unique and exciting time to be living in Berlin.

It would take more than a semester to take in all the city offers, so consider enrolling in FU-BEST for an entire academic year! Rich café life, first-class theater, fantastic opera, cabaret,

world-class orchestras, interesting neighborhoods, lakes and rivers, an alternative art scene, and of course, years of history: Berlin just seems to have it all. Freie Universität, scattered across several campus areas, is located in a primarily residential part of the city. It is well linked to the rest of Berlin (located approximately 30-45 minutes from the center of Berlin by U-Bahn, S-Bahn, and buses). Not far from campus (at the S-Bahn and U-Bahn stations Rathaus Steglitz – a mere 15-minute bus ride from the Lankwitz campus section) is the bustling Schloßstraße, a popular shopping street (including several shopping malls, department stores, cafés, a big electronics store, bookstores, etc.).

Berliners love to eat and drink. One usually seats him-/herself in the restaurant, and in a crowded restaurant or bar it is perfectly acceptable to share a table with people already sitting there. You can ask “Ist hier noch frei?” (Is this free?). While you are not expected to talk to your table mates, this is a possible way to meet Germans.

Eating out: There is an endless number of “reasonable to expensive” eating establishments in Berlin. And there is a fast-food stand (*Imbiss*) on many a corner where a variety of snacks, e.g., *Würste* (sausages) and *Pommes* (french fries), can be purchased quickly and inexpensively. There is also a huge number of *Döner Kebab* shops, featuring relatively inexpensive Turkish food. Throughout the city one can find Thai, Mexican, Chinese, Greek, Indian, Italian, French, American, and vegetarian restaurants as well. Cafés are also very popular. They are abundant, frequently visited, and range in style from the upscale Viennese variety to those that appear to have put no money into the decor, but serve great espresso and have a diverse younger crowd.

Food prices vary considerably, depending on one’s tastes and standards, so it is hard to generalize here. The average tip in a restaurant is 10%. You can leave about 1 Euro for every 10-15 Euros on the bill. Tips are never left on the table, but rather given directly to the waiter or waitress.

Opening hours: Stores usually remain open until 8 pm on weekdays. In selected districts, supermarkets like Lidl, Aldi, Real and Kaufland even remain open until 9 pm, 10 pm or midnight. During the weekend smaller stores might already close at 6 pm. It takes time, especially for many Americans, to get used to the idea that stores, except for mini-markets in gas stations, a few shops at some of the train stations, and the so-called *Spätkauf* shops, are closed on Sunday throughout Germany.

Students will receive a map of the campus and surrounding area upon arrival in Berlin. We advise participants to purchase a copy of a Berlin travel guide as well as a comprehensive Berlin city map. An up-to-date travel guide, at best supplemented by an online version or app, is a very valuable resource during the semester.

Although it is highly unlikely that anyone would have a lack of things to do in Berlin, a “Uniparty” is always a fun time, and a great way to meet Germans.

If you want to know what university parties are happening in Berlin, check out <https://www.facebook.com/StudentenpartyinBerlin/> Another source for party information is <https://www.facebook.com/clubbingbln>: all parties organized by the international Erasmus Program.

Weather:

Check out the weather in Berlin by going to www.wetter.com or www.dwd.de. For those who have trouble thinking in Celsius, temperature conversions can be found at: <http://www.onlineconversion.com/temperature.htm> or <http://www.convert-me.com/en/>.

City guides:

- <https://www.berlin.de/en/>: Official website of the city of Berlin.
- <https://www.zitty.de/>: Zitty contains tons of information about cultural events, music, clubs, restaurants, etc. (in German).
- <https://mitvergnuegen.com/> (in German): Tips for leisure activities in and around Berlin.

16. CULTURE SHOCK?

Over the years, some participants have at times been struck in an uncomfortable way by cultural differences, yet all managed to develop the skills of dealing with such differences. So just in case a sense of what is commonly referred to as “culture shock” emerges, the thoughts below might come in handy.

The symptoms usually appear when a person is uprooted from the safe and secure surroundings of home and transplanted – voluntarily or otherwise – to a totally different cultural setting. The majority of people residing in a foreign country for an extended amount of time encounter physical and psychological reactions to an unfamiliar culture.

Culture shock is a rite of passage for many people – a time when the initial newness of foreign surroundings wears off and the realization sets in that you are going to be in this situation for a long time. Frustration, loneliness, homesickness, depression, irritability, and loss of appetite are the major signs of this “traveler’s disease”.

It’s always the little things that begin to threaten one’s sense of stability and well-being that cause culture shock:

- the way purchases are made
- people’s mannerisms and how to respond to them
- distinguishing between serious and amusing statements
- using different kinds of transportation
- attitudes towards life values
- doing laundry
- food shopping

Symptoms of culture shock might include:

- homesickness (longing to be where things are familiar)
- compulsive eating and excessive drinking
- irritability and excessive need for sleep
- boredom (no discovery of new aspects of the culture)

- hostility and stereotyping of native people
- avoiding contact with natives
- inability to perform work or study efficiently
- tension and conflict with those around you
- unexplained crying and physical problems

Fortunately, not everyone experiences all the above symptoms. Most visitors/outsideers adjust to the local culture reasonably well. They experience some of the symptoms, but are able to recognize and work their way through the problems successfully. For those who do not, it is important to know that some degree of culture shock is inevitable and can occur to anyone.

We encourage all participants to discuss any discomfort or difficulty resulting from culture shock with different people in Berlin, depending on personal need and preference: fellow students, the FU-BEST Academic Directors and their office colleagues, teachers, and/or homestay hosts. Professional counseling is also available.

Useful website: www.worldwide.edu/travel_planner/culture_shock.html.

17. CITY TRANSPORTATION

Public transportation in Berlin is excellent. There is an extensive, easy-to-use network of buses, U-Bahn (primarily underground train system), and S-Bahn (part of the German rail system, primarily above-ground). **As part of the FU-BEST Program Fee, participants receive a pass for use of the public transportation system throughout Berlin (zones A, B, C) tied to their Freie Universität student ID card (CampusCard).**

Bus stops are indicated by a sign with a green capital H inside a yellow circle. U- and S-Bahn stops have signs with a large capital U or S. They are all safe, efficient, run every 5-20 minutes (depending on location and line), and operate until a bit past midnight. Then regular night bus service is available (of course, one can also walk or take a taxi, whatever is easiest). Night life begins late in Berlin. It is possible to find much to do at 2 am, if so inclined. It is usually easier to find a taxi stand than to hail a taxi from the street in central Berlin. Rides start with 3-4 Euros as a base price, then costs vary according to distance and time. Night buses run all night throughout the city, frequenting each stop about every hour. On the weekend, U-and S-Bahn lines run all night.

The commute between Freie Universität Berlin and several of the popular areas – Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg, Kreuzberg, the Ku'damm, Savignyplatz, etc. – usually will take about 30 minutes, but can range from 20 to 45 minutes.

For information regarding public transportation in Berlin, go to <https://www.bvg.de/en>.

Another transport option worth mentioning is a bike. There are special paths, with their own miniature traffic lights specifically for bikers between the road and the sidewalk, in much of

this biker-friendly city. Bikes can be taken onto the U- and S-Bahn; this is free with the CampusCard students receive during Orientation. With a normal public transportation pass, however, one needs to pay a small supplemental fare when taking along a bike. There is a network of (bike) paths in the Grunewald, which is the nearest forest area to the program site (but of course not the only option!). This is a fantastic forest with lakes located 15-20 minutes (by bike) from Freie Universität Berlin, especially great for mountain/all-terrain bikes (not to be missed by anyone interested in nature).

18. INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

For travel outside Berlin, and outside Germany, **German trains** (Deutsche Bahn) are great – efficient, comfortable, stress-free. For train information visit: <https://www.bahn.com/en/view/index.shtml>.

One interesting train option to consider is the so-called *Schönes-Wochenende-Ticket*. It enables up to 5 persons to travel anywhere in Germany on this single ticket and is valid on a Saturday or Sunday. Please note that such a ticket is not good on the IC, ICE, EC, or IR trains (the fast trains, in other words), but it's still a useful and inexpensive ticket for a weekend jaunt to a destination a few hours from Berlin, of which there are many.

Aside from train travel, **traveling by bus** has risen immensely in popularity within the last few years. There are many companies growing fast and offering a tight network of lines, especially within Germany. Bus tickets are usually cheaper than train tickets, but travel will last longer as well. The biggest coach provider is [Flixbus](#). The central bus station, “Zentraler Omnibusbahnhof” (ZOB), is located on the S-Bahn-Ring close to the stop “Messe Nord/ICC”.

For faster travel, many students also use **cheap airlines**, such as EasyJet and RyanAir, but one should be sure to note any “hidden” fees when making online purchases and reservations, and also consider one's ecological “footprint” left with these flights.

Many students have told us that the **ISIC (International Student Identity Card)** is helpful, even essential.

Germany has about 550 **youth hostels**, the largest network in the world. The individual hostels tend to be larger than average, and always have the best of standards. Most hostels have family rooms. Prices vary according to the category. The average price will hover around 25-30 Euros per night. The relevant website is: <http://www.jugendherberge.de/en/>.

Whoever plans on traveling extensively, whether in Germany or other European nations, may wish to purchase a membership from Hosteling International. This allows one to stay at youth hostels all over Europe at reduced rates. Access the website at <https://www.hihostels.com/>. Budget hotels, pensions (small family-run inns), university dorms, and *Zimmer frei* (B&B concept) are plentiful, but they are slightly to considerably more expensive alternatives.

For other reduced student rates across a variety of categories, one can also look at www.studentenpreise.de to find cheap rates for phone and internet service, travel, movies, museums, theater, and much more (in German).

Some more information sources:

- Anything one could possibly want to know about travel in Germany can be found at www.reiseplanung.de (in German).
- www.germany.travel/en/index.html is a site in English that is devoted to German tourism. It contains information about German cities, upcoming events, and transportation.
- We have already mentioned that the Lonely Planet guide for Berlin is excellent. Go to <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/germany/berlin> to find some of the information in the guide. One can also purchase the book from the website. Also go to <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/places> to search for any country (there are limited city guides available online as well, such as Frankfurt and Munich).

19. VISITS BY RELATIVES OR FRIENDS

Please note: in light of experiences gathered over the years, this information is quite essential to both students and their relatives and friends.

In case participants plan to have family or friends visit in Berlin, they should be aware that their responsibilities connected with the program take precedence, so that scheduling visits that conflict with class and/or excursion obligations should be carefully avoided. If parents/guardians, other relatives or friends visit a student housed in the Student Village or The Social Hub (formerly The Student Hotel) used by the program, a hotel in close proximity is: Hotel Landhaus Schlachtensee, Bogotastraße 9, 14163 Berlin, <https://www.hotel-landhaus-schlachtensee.de/> (close to the Student Village) and Mercure Hotel, Mollstraße 4, 10178 Berlin, <https://www.accorhotels.com/de/hotel-8312-mercure-hotel-berlin-am-alexanderplatz/index.shtml> (close to The Social Hub).

We recommend that visits by relatives or friends be scheduled during the midterm break or at the very end of the program. While it may sound tempting or helpful for parents/guardians to bring a student here and help him/her settle in at the start of the semester, this is often rather distracting for the student and not conducive to the feeling of arriving at a new destination as an independent young adult. In addition, there will already be program activities during the first days that students will attend as a closed group. Another advantage of visiting at a later point in the semester is that students will then be better prepared to show visitors around and navigate the city with them.

We urge parents/guardians, relatives or friends not to make any travel arrangements to visit students without having consulted with them first. Scheduling visits that conflict with students' class and/or excursion or even exam obligations will cause them tremendous stress and may even endanger their successful completion of the program. It should also be noted that

it is not permitted to have friends or relatives join during program/course excursions or field-trips.

20. SAFETY ISSUES AND EMERGENCIES

By and large, Berlin is a fairly safe city. Crime rates are well below American big-city averages, for example. Yet it is always important to be careful and aware of one's surroundings. We provide participants with a number of important general safety pre-cautions during Orientation as well as in our daily work. These are summarized here:

- Use your inside pockets. Do not keep important valuables in your jacket's outer pockets or in your backpack.
- Keep your purse zipped shut, and try to hold it to your chest or worn across your body.
- Try to use ATM machines in banks only. Try not to take money out of an ATM on the open street by yourself unless absolutely necessary.
- Try to avoid carrying more cash on you than you actually need.
- If you only need one credit card, only carry one with you.
- Never carry your passport with you unless you are traveling or visiting a government-related site. However, carry a photocopy of it at all times!
- Keep a copy of your credit card numbers and the phone numbers to cancel cards, should they be lost or stolen. Keep this info separate from your wallet.
- Do not fall asleep on public transport.
- Beware of conspicuously friendly strangers. There are many schemes for robbing foreigners.
- Do not fall into a false sense of security.
- Be aware of your environment and use common sense at all times. Be careful, especially after dark. Know where you are.
- When out in a group, don't leave behind anyone on their own, especially not late at night.

In the unlikely event that something does happen, the FU-BEST team is always ready to help with support, advice, and assistance with regard to local officials and offices.

As noted, Berlin is a central-European metropolis that is very safe in comparison to other international cities. There are no serious risks involved while staying in the city or while studying at Freie Universität Berlin. The university campus is located in a mostly residential section in the West of Berlin. Yet – thanks to Berlin's superb public transportation network – it is within easy reach of the city's downtown areas. Still, all students are commuters and will take 30-60 minutes to get to campus from their housing.

In the unlikely case that acute safety problems would arise or in case of dangerous weather conditions, students will be informed by the FU-BEST team and, if necessary, brought to a safe place. FU-BEST works closely with its partners to guarantee a high standard of safety in all institutions and activities of the program and is prepared to support and advise students appropriately.

As outlined under no. 8, FU-BEST provides participants with a **German insurance package** that combines health, accident, and liability insurance. The insurance covers treatment resulting from acute illness and accidents that occur within the European Union. Pre-existing conditions are not covered. Upon arrival at the FU-BEST program site, all participants receive an emergency card with relevant information, for medical/dental/psychological as well as financial, legal, or personal emergency situations. There is also a list of English-speaking doctors in the Student Handbook distributed among all participants during Orientation. FU-BEST staff will assist with making doctor's appointments, if needed, and the follow-up handling of bills and reimbursement through the insurance provider.

The program, as well as Freie Universität as a whole, has **emergency plans** on hand as well as a great network of health and support services. If something affects the program as a whole, information will be communicated abroad – it is thus essential to leave lines of communication open, if possible, so that we are able to act efficiently and promptly. For parents/guardians, the best resources under such circumstances (other than the student him- or herself) might also include the study abroad office at the home institution, but all should be aware that, depending on what they are asking, the age of the student, their relationship to him/her, and what permissions he/she has granted to parents/guardians through their home school, the person on the other end of the phone (both in Berlin or at the home school) may not be legally able to answer parents'/guardians' inquiries in full (or at all).

If something happens that only affects a particular student, we welcome all efforts by his/her parents/guardians to offer comfort and support, but would discourage any communication that might further increase the student's unease, confusion, or distress. For example, under particular circumstances it may be essential to resist the instinct to encourage the student to come home as soon as possible. While this may at times be the right idea, it not always is. Depending on the emergency, a student may be fine to go back to class in a couple of days. FU-BEST will do everything in its power to assist and support each and every student. If he/she is at all capable of doing so, finishing out the semester should remain our common goal. Sometimes, getting back to routine can help regain a sense of normalcy, and keeping busy can make life easier. Going home might feel like giving up, and difficulties that may seem insurmountable at a certain stressful point in time may be resolved successfully a little later in a joint effort here on-site.

Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) is a free service to allow U.S. citizens and nationals traveling and living abroad to enroll their trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

Benefits of Enrolling in STEP:

- Receive important information from the Embassy about safety conditions in your destination country, helping you make informed decisions about your travel plans.
- Help the U.S. Embassy contact you in an emergency, whether natural disaster, civil unrest, or family emergency.
- Help family and friends get in touch with you in an emergency.

If you are a FU-BEST student with an American citizenship we strongly encourage you consider using STEP: <https://step.state.gov/>

21. POSTAL MATTERS & COMMUNICATIONS

In Germany, postal matters are generally taken care of by Deutsche Post, which is easily recognizable by its bright yellow color (mailboxes as well as offices). In addition, there are courier services as well, of course, such as Hermes, DHL, FedEx, and UPS.

Website tip: <https://www.deutschepost.de/en/home.html>

Please note that the opening hours of post offices usually are from 9 am to 6:30 pm from Monday to Friday and on Saturday from 9 am to 1 pm.

Receiving mail and packages:

Those who opt for a program apartment may consider having all their mail sent to the program building:

Your Name
c/o Freie Universität Berlin
FU-BEST Program
Malteserstraße 74-100
Poststelle Raum H 021
12249 Berlin
Germany

If a package or parcel is to be sent to Berlin, be aware of customs restrictions. It is best, as sender, to write the following phrase on the box: “Persönliche Effekte/ Gebrauchtwaren für Studienaufenthalt in Berlin”. If customs officials suspect that import duties ought to be paid, participants will receive a notice by mail and will be asked to go to the local customs office to pick up their package/parcel and possibly pay an import fee.

Calling (from) abroad:

International phone calls require the use of international access codes and country codes. The international access code when calling from the U.S. to Germany is 011 49. The international access code from Germany to the U.S. is 001. After that comes a city or area code and then the rest of the number. The area code for Berlin is (0)30. The first 0 is omitted when combined with an international code.

Calls from Germany to USA: 001 xxx xxx xxxx

Calls from USA to Berlin, Germany: 011 49 30 xxx xxxx

Prepaid SIM cards: An inexpensive solution for using your own cell phone is to purchase a prepaid SIM card. Various providers offer inexpensive rates, such as Fonic (available at LIDL, dm or online), Aldi Talk (available at Aldi), simyo (online) and others. Most cell phone service companies (O2, Vodafone, T-Mobile, etc.) also sell prepaid SIM cards, but these are usually more expensive.

For those interested in obtaining a cell phone or local prepaid card: most participants wait until they get to Berlin to purchase an inexpensive cell phone.

Call-by-call: it is much cheaper to make long-distance/overseas calls via a call-by-call number. The rates of several of those private providers are worth checking out because there are great differences and one can save a lot of money by doing some research!

www.billiger-telefonieren.de

www.billiger-surfen.de

Some communication advice to parents/guardians:

Our recommendation is to arrange for a “safe arrival call” (or e-mail, or text message) and then have some patience until the student has settled in to his/her new surroundings, schedules, and academic framework. If you both wish to do so, set up a (more or less regular) schedule from then on, making sure that it works well for both sides (also in view of the obvious time difference). Remember that a lot will be going on here on-site, and that time will often pass much more quickly for the student than for those back home. Some parents like a brief check-in at the beginning and end of short side-trips, but it may also be necessary to allow for periods of non-communication due to technical or temporal restrictions.

22. COMPUTERS & INTERNET

Students who own laptops/notebooks are urged to bring them. The FU features W-LAN, enabling access to the internet for free by using a personal laptop. We also have several regular computers in place, along with a copier/printer (not free-of-charge; copying and printing is paid for via the CampusCard). The apartments feature an internet connection through Ethernet cable, and WiFi access is provided in the common areas on the ground floor. There is no internet access guaranteed in the homestay accommodations; participants discuss their particular needs and interests with their homestay hosts.

There is, of course, also always the option of utilizing the many (internet)cafés etc. in Berlin for internet access. Here are two useful websites with relevant address listings: <https://www.berlin.de/special/sport-und-fitness/adressen/internetcafe/>, <http://www.berlininfo.com/Freetime/Recreation/internet/index.htm>

Free Wifi access is available at all U-Bahn stations.

23. RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE IN BERLIN

Please keep in mind that **observance of religious obligations** on major feast days is a valid reason for an absence from class, but only if discussed/cleared well in advance with program staff and teachers alike.

When looking for English-language options, the following links may be practical to have:

- A generally useful link to a variety of English-language sites of worship: <http://berlin.angloinfo.com/af/23/berlin-churches-religion-and-spirituality.html>.
- For the Jewish community in Berlin and its various synagogues: <http://www.jewish-berlin.com/synagogues.php>. The synagogues in Berlin will tend to blend German and Hebrew.
- For Orthodox Christian options, see http://orthodox-world.org/world_index.php?country=Germany&state=Berlin&city=Berlin&type=Church or http://www.orthodoxie-in-deutschland.de/o2_die_orthodoxe_kirche/gemeinden/berlin.html.
- For English-language Catholic options: <http://www.english-mission-berlin.de/>
- For English-language Protestant options: <http://www.americanchurchberlin.de/> or <http://www.berlinchurch.org/> or http://www.berlininfo.com/Lifetime/Public/public_religion/religion_christian/churches/index.htm.
- For a list of mosques in Berlin, go to <http://www.islam.de/3068.php?q=Berlin>.
- For Buddhism, turn to: <http://www.buddhismus-bb.de/> (in German) and http://www.berlininfo.com/lifetime/public/public_religion/buddhism/centres/index.htm (in English).
- And for Hinduism, here is an option: <http://hindutempelberlin.de/english/index.html>.

So with Muslim worship on Friday afternoons, Jewish services on Friday evening and Saturday morning, Catholic/Protestant/Orthodox worship on Sunday mornings, in addition to special services and liturgies on particular days, plus Buddhist and Hindu options, there is much available to anyone interested...

24. LGBTQ+ ISSUES

FU-BEST students in Berlin can experience mixed messages about the acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals. There is a **thriving LGBTQ+ social scene** in Berlin (numerous clubs, organizations and magazines are tailored specifically for LGBTQ+ individuals) and students can expect to see open expression of alternative sexual orientations. Although in Berlin attitudes towards sexual orientation will appear very open, one should carefully negotiate each setting and “test the waters” to ensure safety.

There is a gay students department within the student government (AStA) of Freie Universität that organizes events such as lectures, pub crawls and movie nights, and also has opening

hours, where one can get information about LGBTQ+ living in Berlin and support if encountering discrimination. For lesbian, a-/bi-/poly-/pan-sexual women, trans*, genderqueer and intersex people the AStA offers the Autonome [LesBiTransInterA]*-Referat, the “pink” department, which is situated in the attic of the AStA Villa. Casual meet-ups (excluding cis-men) provide a safe space for exchanging views about life, experiences at university and addressing lesbian, gender/queer, trans and intersex issues.

For further LGBTQ+ information/help in Berlin, contact any of the following:

- Lesbenberatung (Lesbian Counseling Center), Kulmer Straße 20a in the Schöneberg area, tel. 030 – 2152000
- Schwulenberatung (Gay Counseling Center), Mommsenstraße 45, tel. 030 – 32703040
- Schwules Überfalltelefon (Gay Attack Hotline), tel. 030 – 2163336
- Mann-O-Meter (www.mann-o-meter.de), Motzstraße 5, tel. 030 - 2168008, info@mann-o-meter.de, for general info open Mon.-Sat. 5-10 pm and on Sundays until 9 pm
- TransInterQueer e.V. (TriQ), Glogauerstr. 19, tel. 030 - 65707785, triq@transinter-queer.org
- Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency Kapelle-Ufer 2, 030 - 18555-1855, beratung@ads.bund.de (counselling hours by appointment only are Mon. 1-3 pm, Wed. and Fri. 9-12 am). If one becomes a victim of discrimination and wants to report their case or needs counselling, it is also possible to reach out over the contact form on their website under “Advice for Individuals”: http://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/EN/Home/home_node.html

For an overview of Berlin’s queer social scene, visit <https://www.visitberlin.de/en/lgbti-gay> or <https://www.visitberlin.de/en/lgbti-events> for a guide on queer events in Berlin. For information on current LGBTQ+ news, visit <https://www.queer.de> (only in German). Popular German LGBTQ+ magazines including information on current events in Berlin are *Sieges-säule*, *L-MAG*, *Libertine Magazine*, *Männer* (English versions are available online).

Some additional information can be found at the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ilga.org), which provides LGBTQ+ relevant legal information by country and region. <https://www.globalgayz.com/europe/germany/> is a LGBTQ+ travel and culture website that compiles news reports, links, stories and photo galleries for over 190 countries. When planning to travel during the semester abroad, this LGBTQ+ student guide might be useful; it provides a general overview on LGBTQ+ rights in different countries: <https://goo.gl/K5AeRB>.

25. STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES OR REQUIRING SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

Any specific requirements should be discussed with the Academic Directors of the program prior to applying. We will always do our best to accommodate all students’ special needs but will also communicate honestly if there are limitations to what the FU-BEST program with its specific set-up, program activities, and housing partners can reliably provide. Admission will

not be denied on the basis of race, ethnic or national origin, creed, gender/sex, religion, disability, age, or sexual orientation/identity.

Special academic accommodations, such as adjusted testing environment and/or time, note-taking, use of laptop during exams, etc. can be arranged, but only if official diagnosis/notification is submitted to the program in writing by qualified staff at the home institution.

Part IV: AFTER THE PROGRAM

26. TRANSCRIPT

Each participant receives a **formal transcript** (in English) from Freie Universität Berlin, which lists all courses taken, including contact hours, and displaying ECTS credits (see below) and course grades. The transcript is normally issued within a month after completion of the program and will only be sent to the home institution or the study abroad provider, as the case may be (in other words, not directly to a student). The FU-BEST program does not offer any Audit option as far as its courses are concerned, nor does it record Pass/No-Pass grades. Each participant is expected to clear his/her FU-BEST course selection with the appropriate advisor(s) on the home campus. Inasmuch as most participants come from partner institutions, credit transfer has generally been a fairly smooth procedure. Each student will also receive a personal electronic grade report. Explanatory information accompanies each transcript.

As far as **credits issued by the program** are concerned, the following may be noted: Regulations concerning the award of credits are standardized by the **European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)**, to which Freie Universität Berlin (and thus FU-BEST) adheres. ECTS is a standard for comparing the study attainment and performance of students of higher education across the European Union and other collaborating European countries in order to facilitate transfer and progression of academic studies. In this system, one academic year corresponds to 60 ECTS credits, which is equivalent to between 1,500 and 1,800 hours of study in all countries irrespective of standard or qualification type. Accordingly, one ECTS credit equals 25 to 30 hours of study.

FU Grade	Points on 100-Scale	U.S. Grade
1,0	98-100	A
1,3	95-97	A
1,7	90-94	A-
2,0	85-89	B+
2,3	80-84	B
2,7	75-79	B-
3,0	70-74	C+
3,3	65-69	C
3,7	60-64	C-
4,0	50-59	D
5,0	< 50	F

27. RE-ENTRY SHOCK?

After having lived and studied abroad, attitudes, perceptions, and values might change considerably. Though one may not realize it, getting on a plane and flying home does not end the international experience.

As a result, some observers and specialists on the matter suggest that “Re-Entry Shock” is the reverse of “Culture Shock”. The following observations have been gathered by the program from a variety of sources.

Re-entry is the process of readjusting to one’s home culture, which has remained the same while the study abroad participant has changed.



Family and friends can be supportive listeners. However, they cannot necessarily be expected to fully understand the study abroad experience. It is thus very important that returning students search for the positive aspects in their home surroundings. On the home campus or in the home town or city, find ways to take advantage of new “cross-cultural” interests that have developed. A few of the ways that those new interests and cross-cultural insights can be incorporated into one’s life back home are:

- Searching out international student groups and becoming involved with them by participating in their activities, tutoring and helping new arrivals adjust to one’s own society.
- Establishing and/or keeping in contact with fellow students who studied in Berlin/Germany as well.
- Talking about personal experiences in a different culture and the problems one had in adjusting to it.
- Sharing stories and photographs with others.
- Following the news of the country in which one studied.

Additionally, we have collected some first-hand experience from former FU-BEST students, who share their personal tips of how to get over reverse culture shock.

I gave myself permission to talk about my experience abroad as well as permission to miss it. I think it is important to embrace your experience abroad and to give yourself permission to speak about it to your friends and family as well as give yourself permission to be sad because you miss it.

I also am happy to enjoy all of the things San Francisco has to offer that Berlin does not, e.g. a hot sunny day today in the middle of winter!!!

Jumping back into my old routine helped.

I reached out to my host family and that made me feel connected again.

I think the thing that helped most was working and filling my time. Basically, distract yourself 24hrs a day so you don't feel sad about not being in the beste Stadt der Welt.

I know that my goal is to return and study in Berlin so I started making plans and doing research, I think this also helped because it doesn't feel like my journey in Berlin is over.

It got much better when I told myself that I am definitely going back there and I told my story in Berlin to many friends. It requires time to get over.

I dress like I did in Berlin when I miss it most. Usually I dress to fit my feeling in my surroundings, so when I dress in my old Berlin clothes I feel connected to my experience/self in Berlin even though I'm in San Francisco.

I pounce on anybody in public I hear speaking German and try to have long conversations with them. I also watch lots of German movies.

I often practice German with one of my coworkers & the store owners of a little Austrian Bäckerei near my university.

Being chained to a car for transportation instead of walking, biking, and u-bahn made me feel terrible coming back to the US. So working out helps, but requires more motivation than simply commuting across the city to school as a daily fitness activity.

28. LOOKING FOR JOBS OR INTERNSHIPS IN GERMANY?

During the semester, pursuing a job or internship is not feasible, in view of the full calendar and tight structure of the program. However, after completion of the FU-BEST semester or one's studies back home, looking for a job or internship in Germany might be of interest. Here are some options.

Option 1: FU-BEST Internship

FU-BEST partners with Ayusa-Intrax GmbH, a German-American organization which arranges internships for foreign students in Germany, to facilitate internship opportunities in Berlin. The internship enriches one's academic experience by immersion in a German workplace and gaining valuable intercultural experience along with career-relevant skills. Internships last for eight weeks (mid-May to mid-July) and are full-time (between 30-40 hours per week). Online applications must be submitted by December 1 for the so-called "stand-alone" option or February 20 if enrolled in that year's regular FU-BEST Spring semester. Applicants need to have completed at least two semesters of university/college level studies at their home university/college. German language abilities beyond the Beginner level are recommended but not mandatory.

Internships are set up with organizations and companies that match the applicant's professional and academic background, previous work experience, and career goals. The work experience is accompanied by an internship colloquium of two hours each week that covers topics such as working life in Germany, personal organization, identifying one's goals and expectations, communication and etiquette in the workplace, the German work ethic, hierarchies, cultural differences, etc. A written report about the experience is required at the end of the internship. Upon successful completion of all elements, the intern is awarded 10 ECTS credits that may be transferred back to his/her home institution.

For more information on fees, schedules and the application process, please visit <https://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/fubest/internships/index.html>.

Option 2: Individual Search

For anyone who is still in Berlin/Germany/Europe, the search will be somewhat easier because one can arrange visits to potential work/internship sites, set up interviews, explore options on-site, etc. Once back overseas, things become more difficult, of course. In either case, unless one is a citizen of an EU member state, the question of the necessary work permit poses itself, which will entail paperwork at the Berlin immigration office. Internships as well as jobs will require a valid residency permit (*Aufenthaltstitel*) and a valid work permit (*Arbeitserlaubnis*). All this paperwork will require time (perhaps even lots of it), so plan well ahead!

Both an internship and a job require an official letter of invitation/appointment by the employer or internship provider before anything can be done at the immigration office. Keep in mind that paid internships are rare in Germany, and that internship providers expect interns to be available for a good number of hours per week and for a relatively sustained period of

time. Whoever is not quite planning something along those lines might want to look for alternative options instead.

In all cases, work or internship, knowing German at a very solid level will normally be indispensable. Students whose German is still at the beginning stages should not expect to find work or an internship easily, if at all. Put together a good CV in English and German. Gather letters of recommendation that can be copied and included with a CV and cover letter when submitting an application somewhere.

Here are some further suggestions (some of the websites listed focus more on either job or internship possibilities, but many could be used in the pursuit of both):

- Job search engines: www.JobScout24.de, <https://www.jobworld.de/>, www.jobsinberlin.eu, <https://jobs.goabroad.com/>, <https://englishjobs.de/>, or <https://www.monster.de/>.
- www.au-pair-agenturen.de: for those looking for *au-pair* opportunities.
- One can explore opportunities through various U.S.-German Chambers of Commerce (GACC). Among the relevant websites are www.gaccny.com, www.gaccsouth.com, www.ahk-usa.com (which has 6 branch offices in the U.S.), www.amcham.de, www.gacom.org, www.gaccphiladelphia.com, etc. (there are a number of regional branches in the U.S.).
- Another option is to end up teaching English in Berlin/Germany/Europe. It is possible to apply for a Fulbright teaching fellowship (a number of former FU-BESTers has managed to get one) or contact a language school in Berlin and beyond directly to ascertain one's chances (e.g. the Wall Street Institute or another, similar chain of language learning centers).
- Some organizations in Berlin that could be contacted include the American Academy (www.americanacademy.de), the Aspen Institute (www.aspenberlin.org), the Center for Cultural Diplomacy (www.culturaldiplomacy.org), or Transparency International (www.transparency.de).
- Also check out <http://www.justlanded.com/english/Germany/Jobs>.
- For International Relations and E-Learning projects, check Freie Universität Berlin, Center for Global Politics, <http://www.global-politics.org> (mostly internships).
- Jobs, trainings, internships, projects referring to East European politics... Subscribe to JOE List: JOE digest: <http://www.joe-list.de/>.
- Another job search engine: <http://www.stellenanzeigen.de/>
- American Jewish Committee: www.ajcgermany.org
- Be a journalist (usually unpaid) for Café Babel (<https://cafebabel.com/en/>), an interesting young organization in Europe: <https://cafebabel.com/en/article/proposal/new/>.
- For jobs available via Freie Universität Berlin, check out the following two websites: <https://www.fu-berlin.de/universitaet/beruf-karriere/jobs/index.html> and <https://www.stw.berlin/en/job-agency.html>.
- For internship possibilities at the German Bundestag (parliament), check out: <https://www.daad.org/en/find-funding/graduate-opportunities/emgip-bundestag-internship/>.

- For State Department internships, check out <https://careers.state.gov/intern/student-internships/>.

29. USEFUL WEBSITES AND INFORMATION ABOUT GERMANY AND GERMAN LANGUAGE

General information:

- <https://www.germany.info/us-en/welcome>: Germany Online! This site, brought to you by the German Embassy and the German Information Center, is a comprehensive site about all aspects of Germany. This is a good resource for information about government, politics, culture, academics, and many other aspects of Germany.
- <https://www.studying-in-germany.org>. This site is wonderful – it has a lot of great articles about the latest news, information about studying in Germany, and articles about German culture (in English/German).

German language:

Feel like brushing up on German language skills before coming to Berlin? There are free downloadable German courses on the Deutsche Welle site <https://www.dw.com/en/learn-german/s-2469>, either in .pdf format or as audio .mp3 files.

Another good site is <https://www.thoughtco.com/german-4133073>, which is all about German language. There are online courses on this website as well.