

# Incoming Student Manual



## Information for Incoming Students

Congratulations on your acceptance to the Hessen-Massachusetts Academic Exchange Programs. An exciting and challenging experience is waiting for you.

This manual is designed to prepare you in the best way possible for your stay abroad. So please read the following information carefully. There are a lot of things you need to know and do. Bear in mind that you are going to be spending a semester or academic year at a different university with an unfamiliar educational system in a faraway region of the world – quite a complex undertaking that requires considerable effort on your part. **Please consider this manual to be complementary to all the information you will receive from your host campus.**

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## The Hessen-Massachusetts Program

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The Hessen-Massachusetts Academic Partnership was implemented in 2004 by the *Hessen State Ministry of Higher Education, Research, and the Arts* and the *University of Massachusetts System*. The objective of the state-to-state program is to support student mobility as well as to implement and foster collaboration between faculty of institutions of higher education in Hessen and Massachusetts, creating an environment that helps participants develop intercultural awareness and knowledge as well as language skills for the future.

Exchange opportunities include short-term, semester and academic year programs. To date, more than 700 students have enjoyed their study abroad experience through the Hessen-Massachusetts Academic Partnership.

## About Hessen

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The State of Hessen is situated in the heart of the Federal Republic of Germany and is home to some of the country's leading universities and research institutes, all of which are within easy reach of **Frankfurt am Main**, Germany's financial and banking center.

Hessen has thirteen state institutions of higher education, comprising six universities, two art academies and five universities of applied sciences.

The institutions of higher education in Hessen offer study programs and carry out research in all major disciplines, achieving a high standard of excellence. They are well-known both for their academic reputation and for their first-class facilities.

The thirteen institutions of higher education offer regular degree courses in German as well as an **increasing number of English-language programs**, specifically designed to provide high quality education to students with little or no knowledge of German. Over 13 % of the student population in Hessen is international, which is above average and shows the attractiveness of the state for international students.

With a population of 6 million inhabitants, Hessen is the fifth largest state in Germany. In addition to excellent study and research opportunities, Hessen has a diverse and picturesque countryside, many historic monuments and outstanding leisure facilities.

# Before you go

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## Academic Planning

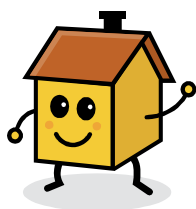


Before you head overseas, we recommend that you talk to your academic advisor and decide which courses you will take at your host university. You should get a clear idea of how these courses could be applied to your degree requirements before you leave.

Universities will often announce their course offerings for a given semester a few weeks before the semester actually starts. However, many courses are repeated each year or fall into the same overall category.

Your knowledge of the German language is a major factor when it comes to course choice. Please note that English-taught courses are available but choices are limited. It is wise to obtain prior approval for a greater number of courses than you actually plan to take, in order to allow flexibility when you are abroad.

## Housing



Exchange students usually live in dormitories. Housing is scarce in most German university towns, so it may prove challenging to find apartments off-campus. Student Services (*Studentenwerk*) are responsible for placing students in dorms. You will be asked to fill in a housing application well before your arrival. By the time you leave home you will already know your address. You are expected to pay your rent in monthly instalments, in addition to a one time room deposit. The

amount may vary by location, ranging from 200 to 450 Euro for your monthly rent and 200 to 600 Euro for the deposit. Be prepared to pay for both your deposit and first month's rent shortly after arrival.

Your dorm room will likely be a single bedroom with a shared bathroom, shower, TV area, and kitchen. You will have to provide your own sheets and towels, and in some cases, kitchenware and utensils.

## Travel Arrangements



Check the academic calendar or arrival instructions provided by your host institution for the date you are expected to arrive. All students must make their own travel arrangements. The most convenient airport to fly into is Frankfurt am Main. From there, you can take the train to your final destination.

## Packing



Pack light! Airlines may charge for excess luggage, so make sure to ask about baggage allowance. Also, you might have little storage space in your dorm room. You will find that German and American students generally have a similar style in dress, taking into account the local climate.

Regarding electrical appliances, Germany operates on 220 volts. US students are therefore required to use converters and adapters.

Bring all of the paperwork you received from your host institution: Letter of Acceptance, housing information, contact information for both your home and host campus. Also make sure your passport's expiration date is a minimum of three months past your return date from Germany. Bring enough cash to pay for the first month's rent and dorm deposit, plus additional cash for transportation, semester fees and other expenses you might accumulate during the first few days. Some housing offices accept credit cards. Remember to pack a small dictionary or download a translator app for your mobile device.

## After arrival

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### Arrival



You can take the train from Frankfurt Airport to your final destination. Follow the signs to DB (*Deutsche Bahn*) and buy your ticket at the *Reisezentrum* or at one of the ticket machines. Most Hessen universities offer a pick-up service from the train station by a *student buddy*. In case you have not received pick-up/student buddy information from your host institution, please ask if a student buddy can be assigned to you.

Hessen's public transport system includes bus, tram and high-speed rail. Do your research on how to get to the campus well in advance via [www.bahn.de](http://www.bahn.de). There is also a Deutsche Bahn app for your mobile device that provides all public transport connections throughout Germany.

### Registration and Orientation at Host Institution



Once you have arrived at your host institution, go to the International Office and let them know that you have arrived.

All international students are required to attend the orientation program offered by the International Office of their host institution. This will give you the opportunity to take care of a number of matters such as signing in with the authorities, getting a residence permit, purchasing your German health insurance, and opening a bank account. The staff will provide you with a program overview, assist you with course choices, and help you sign up for classes. You will also get the chance to take part in a campus or city tour, and sometimes a welcome excursion or cultural event.

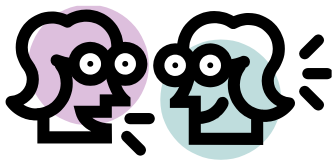
### Visa and Residence Permit



U.S. citizens do not need to apply for a visa to enter Germany. They may enter Germany with a valid passport on the visa waiver program and have to apply for a residence permit after arrival as part of the orientation program of their host campus.

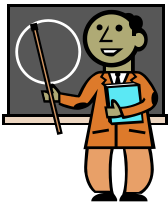
Other regulations apply to Green Card Holders. The international office of your host institution will be glad to provide information.

## Student Mentors/Buddy Program



You will have the opportunity to participate in your host university's *Buddy Program*. Organized by the International Office, the *Buddy Program* is designed to assist international students with all kinds of issues that come up in the first days after arrival: pick-up from the train station, moving into your dorm room, finding your way around the campus and city, grocery shopping, etc.

## German Language Courses



Most Hessen campuses offer pre-semester German language courses that focus on grammar, listening comprehension, reading and conversational skills, and writing in an academic context. On some campuses, these courses are optional but highly recommended; others have made them mandatory. While you may be asked to take a placements test, prior language skills are not required. German language classes are also available during the semester, from beginners to advanced levels.

## Registering for Classes



German universities publish their online course catalogues (*Vorlesungsverzeichnis*) only shortly before the beginning of each semester. Registration for individual academic courses takes place during orientation, with your individual department, or online. Some courses require registration, others don't. Your international student advisors will explain the process to you in greater detail during orientation.

## Computer Access/Internet/Mobile Phones



Every campus provides students with computer services, including email accounts and internet access. Most dorms provide WLAN. A myriad of cell phone providers with prepaid options are available, as well as various types of phone contracts for you to choose from, so make sure to bring your portable devices.

## Meals and Groceries



German universities don't offer meal plans. Inexpensive meals are available at your university's cafeteria (*Mensa*).

Groceries are usually less expensive in Germany than in the US, especially fresh produce. Mid-size supermarkets can be found in the city centers and malls, whereas the bigger stores are located in commercial areas on the outskirts. Public transport will usually get you there.

Beverages in bottles or cans usually include a small bottle deposit which is refunded when you return your bottles or cans. Any store that sells bottled beverages will usually refund the deposit. Tipping in restaurants, pubs and bars is recommended but not mandatory. If you're happy with the service, feel free to round up the price or add 5-10% to the bill.

## Money Matters & Banking



Upon arrival, you will have to cover your first month's health insurance, dormitory rent and housing deposit, as well as your semester fee, which includes public transport. To cover these expenses, a minimum of Euro 1,000 is required, in addition to money for trains and buses, food, and other personal expenses.

Please do not bring checks or traveler checks with you to Germany, since there are hardly any banks that cash checks. Cash and a credit card are your best bet. The most common credit card types in Germany and Europe are MasterCard and VISA.

After your arrival, you will need to open a German checking account: All payment transactions – rent, health insurance, semester fees – must be processed by money transfer from this account. It works best to withdraw money from your American bank account and deposit it into your German bank account. You can also have someone wire money from your home account to your German account; however, it will usually take about a week until you can access your money.

## Opening Times



Be prepared that there is no 24/7 in Germany. Business hours are generally from Monday to Saturday, and most shops open between 8 and 10 a.m. and close between 7 and 10 p.m. Everything is closed on Sundays and public holidays, there are few exceptions: some bakeries are open in the mornings; gas stations are open until late, some even 24/7 shops in train stations and airports are usually open all day.

Banks are open from Monday to Friday, usually between 9 A.m. and 4 p.m. You can withdraw money from the ATM at all other times.

## Health Care Facilities



German medical insurance coverage is required for all university students by German law. It covers the period in Germany, from your arrival at the airport to leaving the country at the end of your stay. This means you need to make sure that your home country's health insurance covers any international travel you plan to undertake. German health insurance must be paid on a monthly basis and by standing order.

German universities do not provide medical service on campus, but your International Office will provide you with a list of English-speaking doctors, including generalists as well as specialists. Your German health insurance allows you to choose any doctor that has been approved by your health insurance company. You will find excellent medical facilities available to you. Pharmacies ("Apotheke") are marked with a big red A and at least one pharmacy in town/city is open 24 hours.

## Important Telephone Numbers

Emergency call: Doctor	112
Emergency call: Fire	112
Emergency call: Police	110
Blocking your bank/credit card in case of loss or theft	116 116

## Grading Systems and Academic Transcript



German grading systems differ from those in the US. Your host institution will provide information about the grading system. The ECTS (*European Credit Transfer System*) is used to calculate course credit. Your home institution will determine the number of transfer credits awarded for each course you take.

Examination systems vary widely as well. Most classes include a final comprehensive exam at the end of the semester. Exams are often specific to a small subject area and may be oral or written, in-class or open book.

**It is the student's responsibility to understand what must be done to receive credit for a particular course.** Please approach each instructor early in the semester so you quickly gain an understanding of how to obtain a record of your courses, grades and credits at the end of your study period. You may be able to access a record of your final grades online via your student account.

## Before you leave

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### Academic Transcript



At the end of your study abroad experience, the International Office of your host campus will issue your transcript on the basis of all courses and grades you have reported to them. **PLEASE NOTE: Transcripts are not issued automatically.** You need to request one and provide proof of your grades.

In some cases, the work students do is documented on an individual *Schein* (grade certificate) which is signed by the instructor and stamped by the department. **You are required to deliver your *Schein* to the International Office at your host campus as soon as you receive them.** Once you have handed in all *Schein* for your semester or academic year at the International Office, they will prepare and send your academic transcript to your home campus. Please make sure you approach your instructors early in the semester to request that a graded certificate (*benoteter Schein*) be given to you at the end of the course, and that you find out what the requirements are for obtaining a graded *Schein*.

Your transcript is the only official academic record of your studies in Germany and will be sent to the International Office at your home campus. Even with prior approval for course credit by your home campus we advise you to keep course syllabi, term papers, reading lists, exam material, and any other course related documents until your course credits have been granted.

### De-registration

Prior to your departure, please be sure to check all items off the following list:

- Housing: Cancel your housing contract at the housing office (*Studentenwerk*), deliver your key, and collect your deposit
- University: Terminate your status as a student at your host campus at the International Office or at the *Studierendensekretariat*.
- Town Hall: De-register at the *Einwohnermeldeamt*.
- Bank: Close your bank account.
- Health Insurance: Cancel your German Health Insurance

Once you have completed your studies in Germany, we would love to hear your story! Please tell us about your study abroad experience in form a short report/testimonial ([info@massachusetts.hessen.de](mailto:info@massachusetts.hessen.de)).

## Contacts

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For questions, please contact: [info@massachusetts.hessen.de](mailto:info@massachusetts.hessen.de). For location specific questions, please contact your host institution advisor.

*We hope you have a pleasant and successful study abroad experience and that your stay with us meets your expectations!*



# Map of Hessen

