



Like in the movies

Before departure

Before departure the information flow is rather tricky. You will have quite a lot of questions and there are so many websites. But overall you do not have to worry because most of the questions will be answered later or are already organized. The most important task before departure is the visa for the US, which can take quite a while to get. The second most important task is the flight to Des Moines. At first, I booked my flight to Chicago and spent one week there to do a bit of sightseeing and get used to the American way of life. That was super helpful because when I arrived in Ames, I had to get used to the campus and university system but not to some common things in the US overall, which made it by far less stressful. There are a lot of different ways to get to Ames. I took the flight from Chicago to Des Moines were the university picks you up during your arrival day. Another option is the (Greyhound/Jefferson Line) bus. Or you rent a car. But taking the airplane to Des Moines is by far the most convenient way. I booked my return flight as a round trip with my flight to Des Moines, but some students decided to extend their stay in the US and really used their visa. Just keep that in mind when you book the flight.

Upon arrival

The arrival was super easy and nice. ISU payed for the trip from Des Moines airport to the university with an Executive Express (shuttle). It was not as nice as the arrival day in Stockholm because when I arrived, there was nobody from the university itself to guide you. The shuttle drivers were all very helpful and they are generally interested in you and your home country. Because I am a graduate student the arrival week was not mandatory for me, but I decided to attend it and that was the right decision. During that week I met most of the people I later spent my free time with during the semester abroad. Besides that, you get to know the campus and how everything works. Otherwise, I would have done that during the first weeks of classes and that would have been definitely more stressful. Overall, the Arrival-Weeks are very important for US universities and that is why we basically had two parts. At first, the arrival of all exchange students and afterwards the big arrival ceremony for all new students (including all the freshman students).

Financials

Financially the biggest expense was the housing and the dining. I decided to stay on campus in a dorm room because it was easy during arrival. I lived in a shared apartment in Sweden and in a single room in Iowa. The room in Iowa was more expensive than the room in Sweden. But because I am used to have a private room I chose to 'invest' the money for a



private space. Dining was the next big expense which was easier to take because I hadn't have an own kitchen like students in the apartments. Nevertheless, you still have shared kitchens in the dorms, but it was nice to have the buffet styled dining halls. I think it would have been a bit cheaper to cook by myself, but then I would have needed to buy cooking supply and dishes, as well. The flight was rather expensive because it adds up with the flight to Chicago and then to Des Moines, plus the luggage. Books and office supplies can add up, as well. My books cost a couple hundred dollars and after I bought them, I decided bring them home. All in all, it was more expensive to study in the US than in Sweden, but the experience was worth it.

Accommodation

As mentioned before, I lived in a dorm (Wallace & Wilson Commons) which are 'on' campus but at the same time they are furthest away from the center of the campus. I thought it was really nice because, we built a community and could meet in the commons area. The apartments at Frederiksen Court were also nice and most of the other exchange students lived there. Frederiksen Court are shared apartments, while Wallace Wilson are dorm rooms. Both have their advantages and even though there are the furthest away from campus it is super easy to get to the lecture halls with the buses. The building was old, but it was appropriate for me. I spent most of the time learning in the library or somewhere else and basically just slept in my room. I had no AC which was a bit annoying for the first couple of weeks, but it got cold pretty soon and, thus, was not a big deal for me. During wintertime the heating was on 100% and it was annoyingly hot in the room, but the staff could not change this; so, I had to keep the window open. My room was spacious and quiet which was the most important aspect for me.

University and studies

The Iowa State University is a typical US college which means it has a huge campus and a lot of students compared to KTH. Because of the location, Iowa State is famous for their agriculture program, but also for their aerospace engineering program. Like at KTH most departments or fields have their own building and thats why you spend most of the time in just one building. According to studies and surveys, the campus is one of the most beautiful and one of the safest in the country and I can totally agree with that.

Courses

I, as a graduate student, had to pick three courses on a graduate level or five at an undergraduate level. Before arrival and because of the fact that we have to hand in the preliminary study plan, I had a few courses in mind and attended all of them in the beginning. In the end, my final selection was: CRP 535, CRP 563 and URB D 532. It was a nice mix of theoretical and practical courses. Especially, CRP 563 was a lot of work but worth it. I called this course the book-club because we had to read a planning-focused book every week. CRP 535 was a hands on planning course, were we had to evolve a development strategy for a small park in



a neighbouring town. URB D 532 was a GIS course with a specific focus on urban planning. It is a nice entry-level GIS course. All three teachers of those courses were super helpful, and I am still in contact with two teachers from Iowa State.

City and country

Ames, Iowa is a typical college town in the US. Everything is focused on the university and the campus. Some would say Ames is in the middle of nowhere and that is somehow true, but at the same time I enjoyed being somewhere I would have never visited on vacation. It is quite easy to reach the airport in Des Moines and from there you can go everywhere. Ames itself is a nice little railway town with a small downtown area and a shopping mall. For me, Iowa and Ames are distilled versions of America and especially the Midwest. The Walmart Supercenter or the car-dependency are just two examples of the aspects I mean. But at the same time, I did not have a culture shock because I knew what I had to expect.

Leisure and social activities

I had two major leisure activities, working out and travelling. Iowa State has two big gyms which offer basically everything for free (no extra entry, etc.). Weights, pools, classes, rock climbing, squash, etc. I tried to use the gyms as much as possible and tested every possible sport they offered. It was simply a nice get-away from all the learning. Like most exchange students I tried to travel as much as possible. Even though it looks like Ames is in the middle of nowhere, it is located in the middle of the US and; therefore, it provides a short way in every direction (for American standards).

Other recommendations and observations

Do not be shy to ask.

