



Washington University, St. Louis

2017-2018

preparation
exchange/placement application process
<p>The application process starts by submitting your motivation letter, CV, financial- and study plan to Utrecht University. Keep in mind that the average grade for studying at Washington University in Saint Louis (WashU) is 7.0. In May, I had to send WashU an academic transcript in English and a TOEFL or IELTS score report. As an alternative to the test score, a letter from International Office at Utrecht University was acceptable.</p> <p>After this, you will receive a DS-2019 checklist from WashU. You will have to fill out the checklist and you will need a bank statement in your own name (or in someone else's name together with a statement of financial support, which is for instance a letter set up by yourself with your parents' signature) and a copy of your passport. After sending all the required documents, WashU will send you your DS-2019 form. You will have to request a DS-160 (non-immigrant form) and a Sevis 1-901 form at the Embassy website of the US in Amsterdam. Only after receiving each form, you can make an appointment for your visa. The process takes some time and it may be busy at the Embassy, so make sure you start as soon as you receive the DS-2019 checklist from WashU.</p>
counselling/support at home university
<p>International Office was willing to sign the above letter as a proof of language proficiency. They were also willing to answer all my questions and gave presentations about studying abroad. I could pass by at their office or call them during their opening hours and they helped me a lot.</p>
academic preparation
<p>As academic preparation, I looked up information about the university and about the courses. By looking at the courses you can also set up your study plan. This is an indication and will not oblige you to follow certain courses. However, it is important to have an idea, because some courses are popular and have few spots. Try to apply as soon as possible online when the registration starts so that you will be sure that you follow the courses you prefer. Once you will be at St. Louis, WashU helps international students whenever they have difficulties with their schedule. The deadline for dropping (most) courses was after the first classes, which was helpful. I personally did not like a course I had chosen and dropped it after the first week for another course. You can also choose to be on a waitlist, so that you will be automatically enrolled when a student drops the course.</p>
language preparation
<p>I had some classes in English at Utrecht University and I followed the 'Legal English for Academic Purposes' course. This course is offered by Babel and is focussed on legal vocabulary, presentation, writing and speaking skills. However, the content of the course is about the English legal system, not about the American legal system. The level of difficulty is not very high, but it made me feel more comfortable to speak English. Once I arrived in St. Louis, my language skills developed very quickly. There is a lot of interaction with the other students, professors etc., so I learned the most by doing.</p>
finances



The minimum amount your bank statement needs to show is \$11,978. I did not spend this amount (and I travelled a lot), but do not underestimate the costs of living in the U.S. For instance, the obligatory health insurance at Washu was \$800. Even though I was already insured at my Dutch insurer, the insurance was still obligated.

study/placement abroad period

study programme/work plan (concerning content and organisational issues)

The way of studying is very different from Utrecht University. Instead of preparing working group assignments, students prepare cases. There are no questions to prepare in advance and in class the cases will be discussed. It is a lot of reading (especially for exchange students). The professor does not give you the "correct answers". Instead, the professor asks questions at students about the cases. The professor expects you to be able to answer those questions. You will find out the correct answer by listening to the other students. Making notes is important to prepare for the exams, since you almost only have cases in your textbook. By preparing cases and making notes in class, students will be able to understand how each part of the theories relate to one another.

academic quality of education/placement activities

The academic quality of education at WashU is very high. The students are ambitious and the professors have a great professional background. The professors expect you to be well prepared and to be able to answer questions in class. This may sound scary, but the professors are very approachable and willing to help students any time at their office.

counselling/support at host institution/organisation

There is a lot of study assistance at WashU. They organize all kind of activities to develop lawyer skills. For some classes I had a teaching assistant who helped me writing memo's, prepare for exams and how to use Westlaw (an online research program). I have especially developed my English writing skills by writing memo's. Before each deadline there were meetings with the teaching assistant or attorney to discuss the memo.

transfer of credits

Once at WashU, they will ask you to sign a transcript request form. With this form students give their approval that WashU sends the transcript to their home university. This will go automatically.

student life

welcome/orientation programme

The professors introduced the American legal system, we had a tour in the library and there were presentations about for instance public transport (you will receive a pass to travel for free), health insurance and other important things. The program was helpful, but more intellectual focussed than focussed on social interaction between students.

accommodation

On campus housing is only for undergraduate students. Since law is a graduate program, I lived in an apartment together with another person in Central West End. I found this apartment in a Facebook group, but the website 'Craigslist' is also useful. Central West End is a very nice and safe place to stay (with nice restaurants and bars), but a bit further away from campus.



leisure/culture
<p>It is worth to see the famous arch of St. Louis. There is also a zoo, botanical garden, parks, museums, bars etc. It is also very nice to go to a baseball game. Besides legal events, WashU organizes a lot of parties. For instance, with Halloween WashU organized a party at the City Museum. WashU also organizes a drink every week on Thursday.</p> <p>Some parts of the city are dangerous so I recommend not taking the metro or walking alone at night. The parts of the city are spread out, so taking a taxi will be necessary.</p>
suggestions/tips
<p>There is so much to see in the U.S. I have seen amazing cities and I highly recommend travelling around in California. I also recommend to fully enjoy the American culture and traditions like celebrating Thanksgiving.</p>
conclusions
would you recommend this host organisation/destination to others? please explain
<p>I would recommend St. Louis, because it is really amazing to be at a school where everyone is so passionate about law. You will understand the American legal system and culture much better. WashU is a high ranked university and the campus is beautiful. I felt very privileged to study there, because it is not easy for American law students to get into this law school.</p>
do you have any additional advice or comments?
<p>I had the best time at WashU. I have worked hard with ambitious people around me, made international and American friends and went to nice events. Studying in the U.S. so far away from home is a lifetime experience.</p>

2016-2017

Preparation

On August 5th 2016 I departed to the United States to study a semester at Washington University in St. Louis. The preparation itself started almost a year before my actual departure. When I decided I wanted to go abroad I first searched on the UU site for my options. Especially the reports I read from former students were really useful during my preparation process. I did chose for Washington University because of the outstanding quality of education and ranking of this University. I wanted to go somewhere where I would learn a lot, but where I should also have a memorable time. Which I found in St. Louis.

After I received the news that I was enrolled at WashU, the real preparation started. A good advice: start your preparation as soon as possible to avoid stress. Especially requesting a Visa and other traveling documents take time, and you need them to fill in other reports. You need a lot of documents and fill in a lot of forms, so you have to take that into account with your preparation time schedule. Moreover, if you have any questions regarding the type of documents a.o. you can easily ask the University, they are happy to help you and they always respond quite quickly. Thereby, this is the first thing you'll probably notice, there are a lot of professors and other workers at the university who like to help you in any way. You can either e-mail them, call them, skype with them.. anyhow, they really take time for you. Moreover, you can also always ask the International Office in the Netherlands to help you with your questions regarding your preparation.



An important element regarding your preparation process is to find housing. This might not be as easy as you sometimes read on the internet. I only had an accommodation for the first week so I could visit some rooms in this week to find a home for the next months. I was lucky to find an apartment on Facebook (there are different Facebook groups for student housing in St. Louis) together with 2 other guys close to the university (skinker blvd). Other students found their room either by craigslist or the university itself (which is a lot more expensive). But also with this, having a room before arrival avoids a lot of stress. Thereby, St. Louis is divided in different neighborhoods. There are place where you'd rather not stay. Tip of advice: try to find a house as close to campus as possible, since most of the students are living here, it is safer and you'll spend a lot of time on campus anyway.

(Student)

Life

St. Louis is different than every other city in The Netherlands. Everyone is transporting themselves by either the bus, metro or they have their own car. I, however, decided to buy a bike during my first week. Getting the bus or the metro also works perfectly, especially since there are no bike lanes so you cannot go everywhere by bike and thereby you get a free metro/bus pass. Nevertheless, the metro is not the safest place to be by night and since most of the parties are at student houses it is nice to go by bike.

I liked St. Louis as a city, people are friendly and very approachable. During your introduction week the people of the University will introduce you to the city and the safety of it. However, if you just stay in the good parts of the city you'll most likely not experience any problems.

Close to the university, at Delmar loop, and also CWE, there are different bars and restaurants to go to. This is of course also part of the experience. The nightlife is different than you are used to in Holland since they have a whole different culture. As you might expect from the Americans, the focus is much more on the food and less on the drinks ;). After going out it is best to go home by Uber, there are a lot of international students at campus, with whom you most probably will hang out with, to share one.

I really recommend to make some trips on the weekends. Chicago is not too far and there are also couple of 'long' weekends if you want to visit some other cities in America. For example, I went to San Fran in the fall break and also to NYC in another weekend. It is nice to see the differences between the states and cities of this country since it is so big and they all have their different types of law.

Studying

Abroad

Enough information is provided by the university concerning the different courses. Although, it is recommended to contact your supervisor at WashU if you need any help to select your courses. I changed my courses in the first week, which was no problem, and I'm glad that I did it.

The way the courses are taught is different than you are used to at your home university. The professors expect you to be fully prepared and to participate in class. The workload is much higher since the classes are mostly tutorials and there are no lectures provided. The professors know everyone by name and they are happy to help you with everything so don't hesitate to swing by their office.

The University provides a course to introduce you to the American law system during the introduction week. This course is really useful. It is not mandatory, but I advise you to do it anyway since it will help you to understand the basics of both federal and state law, which will be useful for other courses.



Conclusion

Go for it!

2016-2017

Preparations/Requirements

I think that I began my preparation for studying at the Washington University in Saint Louis (WashU as it is called) about a year ago, before I left the Netherlands in January 2017. At that time, I already contacted WashU regarding the requirements and how to complete my visa application (which will take quite some time and a lot of paper work). Studying in the United States is far more different than in Europe. The requirements to visit the country are more strict than free travelling in Europe. Therefore, a good preparation is a must. The first thing on my list was fulfilling the requirements to be considered. First thing on my list was taking the IELTS-test (testing reading, speaking, listening and writing skills in English). So yes, there is an English language test for studying at WashU. This is mandatory and you will need the grade of a 7.0 on average on IELTS in order to be considered at WashU. The IELTS exam is an international accepted certificate to proof your proficiency in English. Nowadays, even Master's programmes in the Netherlands set requirements for your English proficiency through the IELTS test. Please, do not see it as a burden, but as an investment. In addition to that, Dutch students often have a good language background in English. If you just prepare for the exam (about a few weeks in advance) then I can rest assure you that there is nothing to worry about. The IELTS-test was the first I had completed upon my application. Now the second requirement, a grade average of a 3.0 GPA/7.0. Personally, I did not find this to be any trouble. Bear in mind that WashU is considered as an elite university which is close to the Ivy League universities. The grade requirement has to be fulfilled both upon application at UU as well as your application at WashU. You will also have a selection at UU where the same grade requirement of an 7.0 applies. After selection at UU you still have to maintain an 7.0 average until your application at WashU. Do not think that you can receive low grades after being selected at UU! Two application rounds, for both UU and WashU, so two times a 7.0 on average.

The next thing on the list was receiving the DS-2019 form (most important form which allows you to study in the US) from WashU. At first, you will need to have a bank statement stating that you are in possession of an amount of \$11671. Ask your bank and they will sent it within a week. Furthermore, you have to fill in a checklist form as well. WashU will then sent the DS-2019 to you and you will receive it within two or three days. When you receive the DS-2019 form, you will have to request a DS-160 (non-immigrant form) and Sevis 1-901 form at the Embassy website of the US in Amsterdam. Only with these three forms can you receive your J1-visa. Make an appointment directly at the Embassy after you have received each form, since it is always busy there.

If you have any questions about the process you can also contact Rachael Johnson or Peter Cramer, they are extremely helpful and could guide you through the process at WashU.

Academically



In the Netherlands we have in general a quite passive form of education at university level. However, in the US it is completely the opposite. During my time at WashU I did not have to make workgroup assignments even once, because there was none. Our homework was to study the book and discuss the material in class. I followed International Human Rights Law, Criminal Law and Contracts. Was it a lot? Yes it was, more than at UU. Full-time is really full-time there. Do not underestimate that and think that you can have a break for a week, because you will get behind and it is extremely difficult to catch up. The material is much more than at UU and it takes more time (especially for an exchange student) to learn all the material. Even more important is that you have to understand the studied material, because in the US the professors will use the Socrates method. This method means that the professor does not even explain the material, the students have to explain the material through the questions of the professor and discussing with each other. Personally, I love engaging in discussions and hear the point of view of other students in a subject matter. However, there are also students who can become quite anxious when their name is being cold called by the professor. The JD-students at WashU (the students who follow the degree towards being an advocate in the US) expect you to prepare the material, otherwise the class will have to wait on you, which holds up the flow in class. Prepare the material and try to understand what you are learning instead of just learning it and thinking that you will be fine. Not only will this improve your grades and knowledge, but the professor will actually take your class participation into consideration when examining you. Furthermore, the professors have office hours for which you can make an appointment. I made an appointment with professors whenever I did not understand a certain subject. Professor Inazu from Criminal Law is the best professor I have ever had. He made a lot of hypothetical cases during the course and we had interesting discussions. Each class we had to sit in different rotations to discuss the material with different students. This helped me to understand the material even better and questions are also to be asked to your fellow student-mates. If you have the chance, take one of Inazu's courses. Leyla Sadat was my professor of International Human Rights Law and she is a big player in the Human Rights field. My ambition is to work in an environment combining Criminal Law and Human Rights Law and receiving class from these two professors was a real eye-opener. In general, professors at WashU have a great professional and academic background, but more relevant and important, their way of teaching is efficient to the students to develop an own independent academic mindset.

Exams and Credits

I did not find the exams to be that hard. But, the professors are curving the grades. This means that you can score quite high on an exam but still receive a lower grade because other students have even higher grades. It is competitive, but I did not mind this, it is challenging and if you like challenges then you are in the right place. I received three A's, one B+ and my lowest grade was a C+. Furthermore, I participated in the Moot Court competition which is mandatory for all LLM-students (also exchange) if you start at WashU in the second semester. From 110 students I became third at the Moot Court and even received a plate for it. You will have to present your oral argument in front of judges in two rounds. If you are the best in the first round (against 8 other competitors) you will go the next round, the finals. After you have finished your semester you will be asked to sign a form for the Transcript of Records and WashU will then send your grades to UU. Remember, WashU works with Units and not ECTS (1 unit is 2 ECTS).



Social life

When you start in January you will have an introduction program. Here, you can meet other international students. I made friends quite quickly and it is fun to meet students from other countries. WashU is a wealthy university, their Gary Sumers Recreation Centre (sport centre) is amazing. It has just opened in October 2016. You have a basketball court there, swimming pools, a gym (also taking classes in a variety of sports) and indoor running fields. I love soccer and going to gym. Because I went to WashU during the winter period, I decided to sign up for Futsal (indoor soccer). I never expected that Americans were so competitive and fanatically with sports. But I had a lot of fun and it was organized very well (I could even see the results and standings on a special application on my phone). Students are playing basketball every night, so you can just join them if you like basketball. Also, the Law faculty often organizes (on Friday) a free-food Friday, where there is a buffet and you can eat for free. You can meet up there with other students. At the end of the year there is a festival named Wild (late April). WashU is, like I said, wealthy and well-known. They arranged Jason Derulo to give a concert. I was impressed because he is an international artist. The concert was amazing. You can go to Delmar Boulevard where they have cafes, clubs, bars and restaurants. A lot of students go there. Also check out the SkyDeck in Saint Louis Downtown with other students, you will have a great view on the Gateway Arch. Saint Louis is also known for the Saint Louis Cardinals, one of the best baseball teams, you can catch a game there or go to a hockey game. There are plenty ways to socialize, it just depends on your preference and how far you want to commit socially. But do remember, studying is full-time. Do not expect to party every week since you do not have the time and WashU is not a party university.

Travelling

I saved a lot of money, because I always had the ambition to travel throughout the United States. The first place I went was Chicago which is just (for US terms) 6 hours away from Saint Louis. Chicago is a mind-blowing city. If you go by train with Amtrak, it will cost you (if you book early) 40 dollars which I found to be very cheap. During Spring Break I went to the Grand Canyon, Zion National Park and Las Vegas. Zion National Park was amazing, go there with your friends, it is a national park in the state of Utah, more beautiful than the Grand Canyon. Go there and explore the Narrows! After my exams I visited New York, Miami, Los Angeles, San Francisco, the Caribbean and Hawaii. It sounds like a huge investment, but travelling within the US was not that expensive and if you arrange good AirBnBs then the costs will fall out lower than usual. Book the flights on time! If you wait then you will perhaps pay 250 dollars too much for your flight (like I did to New York). Travelling really developed me to be independent and I overwrote many setbacks whilst travelling. I did not regret it, so if you can travel, then go!

Costs during stay



If you want to study in the US, you will have to be able to show at a certain moment that you have possess the amount of \$11,671 on your account. You have to ask your bank for a bank statement and then you have to scan the statement to WashU. A year before I left I already started to save money, so try to save as much as you can in advance for the fun things. Eventually, the money of the bank statement was much higher than my actual expenses.

Something that I do regret was my flight ticket. I paid over 1000 euro for my flight from Amsterdam to Saint Louis. Do not make this mistake! Go from Amsterdam to Chicago, since Chicago is a place to go, the ticket prices are also up to 600 euro lower! From Chicago you can take Amtrak for about 40 dollars directly to Saint Louis. You will arrive at near WashU as well with the train. I could have saved 600-700 euro. During my stay in St. Louis I paid 350 dollar a month for the rent (extremely cheap, I took the room over from another student of UU). WashU has a special housing page on Facebook where you can search for a room or apartment, furnished or unfurnished, as well. I have to say that food was my biggest expense during my stay. In the US the food is just expensive, everything I wanted to buy would cost me 5 dollar. Although the dollar is worth less than euro, if you buy something in the US then everything is priced without taxes. Once you go to the counter then tax will be added. Doing groceries is expensive and also other US-students agreed with me on that. I spent around 400 dollar a month on groceries. I spent more money on groceries a month than on my rent.

Something that you will have to pay for is the health insurance at WashU, which is mandatory. This was around 700 dollars for one semester. Books are also quite expensive. Try to buy them second hand. You can buy books from Amazon.com. Create an Amazon account there and tell Amazon that you are a student and you will receive Amazon Prime. With Prime you can receive second hand books within two working days without charges and watch movies and series for free during your semester. Totally worth it. Going to Gary Sumer Recreation Centre is without costs! You can go to the gym for free and do any other sports for free. Public Transportation within Saint Louis is also free, because you will receive a public transportation card in the first week of your introduction from WashU which allows you to travel within Saint Louis. Public transportation in Saint Louis is well structured by MetroLink and it is very easy to go from one neighborhood to the other one. If you want to buy a bike then you can just check craigslist.com and buy one for 50 dollar-100 dollar. Roads in the US are long, keep in mind that walking from one place to another will take you more time then you expect.

Recommendation

Studying abroad was the best thing I have ever done. Washington University is a wonderful university with great professors and students, academically top-notch. But the whole experience around that, all the setbacks that you will have in a foreign country outside of Europe, will make you a more independent, confident and intelligent person which will make it a lifetime experience. That alone is a reason to study abroad at Washington University.



2016-2017

Preparation
Exchange/placement application process:
I spent quite some time on the motivation letter. I was aware of the fact that American universities require students to show their talents and abilities in their letter. Opposed to a European approach (being relatively modest when describing your achievements and talents), the American approach wishes students to elaborate on their skills and personal development. My advice in this respect: do not be too shy and don't be afraid that you will be regarded as an "overachiever" when writing your letter.
Counselling/support at home university:
The international office of the Utrecht University provided for adequate help and support. Smooth process without any trouble.
Academic preparation:
No academic preparation. I felt quite confident since I planned my exchange after finishing the "official" part of my Master's degree. Therefore, for me personally, this exchange really was the last phase of my academic career and I did not feel the necessity to prepare academically in advance.
Language preparation:
I conducted a language interview with a teacher of the English department of the University of Utrecht to demonstrate a sufficient level of English. No other preparation in this respect.
Finances:
I worked as a Student Law Assistant at a law firm for quite some time in order to save money for my exchange. Please bear in mind that the costs of living in the US are relatively high and some unexpected costs might surprise you (e.g. obligatory health insurance \$800 dollar while I was already insured at my Dutch insurer, this was still obligatory). Make sure you have sufficient funds to overcome these costs. Besides my savings, I still received a loan from DUO to suffice in my expenses.
Study/placement abroad period
Study programme/work plan (concerning content and organisational issues):
Please take some time to think about your study programme. There are some courses that are particularly popular among the students and the students who apply first will get the spot. Avoid being on waitlists for courses since (if there is no place at the end) you would have to choose other courses just before the academic year starts and these might then not be your preferred choices. For me, since it was something "extra" in addition to my regular master program, I chose two courses that were in line with my Master Corporate Law (Patent Law and Real Estate Transactions) and two courses that I found interesting to follow especially in light of the US presidential election (Election Law and Foreign Relations Law). If you go to WASHU during your bachelor's degree, I would advise to choose courses that are all in line with your (most) preferred areas of law.
Academic quality of education/placement activities:
The Washington University in St. Louis is a top-20 university in the US (out of approx. 200 Law Schools) so the academic quality is very high. Bear in mind that the American students are very competitive due to extremely high tuition fees and the competitive way of grading (against each other). The material is not more complex than the material taught at the UU, but due to the mentality of the American students and the requirements of active participation in small groups, you will notice that you will have to make an effort to keep up to speed. At least that is what I experienced.
Counselling/support at host institution/organisation:



Very good. Maybe opposed to Dutch student life (in which students are very independent and expected to take care of themselves) American university feels more like a high school in which counselling and support is deemed very important.

Transfer of credits:

This was done by my host university through a official letter to the UU. I did not have to do anything myself

Student life

Welcome/orientation programme:

Pleasant way to meet the other international students and get to know the university and city.

Accommodation:

I stayed at a guest house during my exchange. I experienced that most leases required a 1-year contract and the houses were mainly unfurnished. Not an ideal situation for students who only stay for a couple of months. Staying at a guest family was the perfect place for me. Please note that in American cities, places can be very far apart. Do not estimate distances especially due to lack of public transport etc. I would highly recommend to look for an accommodation close to the Campus as you spend most of your time there and American campuses do provide for lots of opportunities with regard to sports etc.

Leisure/culture:

Chicago is a five hour drive. A very nice city to visit during the weekend.

I did participate in the College soccer team, a great way to meet and integrate with American students.

Suggestions/tips:

A bike is very useful due to the aforementioned lack of adequate public transport.

Conclusions

Would you recommend this host organisation/destination to others? Please explain:

I would definitely recommend WASHU if you are looking for an academic challenge. If you are looking for the time of your life by means of a great social life etc, you should consider other places. In addition, please note that St. Louis is located in the Mid West and is by no means a representation of the "USA" we know. For me this was a real eye opener and for that reason a very interesting experience.

Do you have any additional advice or comments?:

Enjoy your time because it really is a life-time experience!