

STUDY ABROAD

EXPERIENCING THE STATES

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EXCHANGE WITH CMU PITTSBURGH



OUR STUDIES IN PITTSBURGH

WHY?!

It is a both learning and fun experience to get to spend some time of your graduate studies outside of the parent university. In our case it was two of us - both from the same study program at TU Delft, namely Engineering and Policy Analysis Program at Faculty of Technology Policy and Management. We spent the fall semester 2006 at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, USA. Some detail behind our choice before we go on to discussing our experiences. First it was home to a very similar program of study like the one we were studying at Delft. Second not only it was different country, it was a different continent altogether - so that would make the whole experience a kind of exploration. Third, both of us had only seen US in movies, this was the chance to live it. Both of us independently applied for the program and were selected to attend the John H. Heinz III School of Public Policy and Management. Now we go on to live there.

THE EXCHANGE

It was an exchange program that officially exists on paper as an MoU between Delft and Carnegie Mellon. Under this program students from both partner universities can choose to spend up to one year at the other institution. The tuition fee has to be paid at the parent university. Credits can be transferred to enable the students to graduate on scheduled time without delay.

"This was the chance to live in the US!"

The school at Carnegie Mellon has similar courses to the one at Delft, hence it is possible to take replacement courses. However, there is a caveat - no official structure exists for the program. It tells you nothing about the courses that should be taken and how the conversion of credits would take place. Also it does not detail how the credits and courses from other exchange university would be accepted at the parent university.



Carnegie Mellon University Campus



Tower of Learning, Pittsburgh

TIPS & TRICKS

- Plan everything way in advance.
- Talk to students who have been there previously.
- Make sure visa (both return and for US), tickets and housing have been arranged before you leave the country.
- In US it is not possible to get around on a bicycle. There are no cycling tracks. The only options for getting around the city are public transport or a personal car. Public transport is slow but available (though not until late in night), but might be expensive. In Pittsburgh you can use the bus with your campus ID free of charge.
- There are parts in the city which are not very safe. Make sure you know location of these, and ensure that you do not take house in such areas.
- Housing agencies are not willing to sign a contract for less than a year - so if your trip is shorter you should start looking out for an accommodation way in advance.
- Get in touch with the students from your home country who are studying there. They really help.
- Register for course before you leave for US otherwise you might be put in waiting list.

OUR FREE TIME IN THE STATES

VISITING FRIENDS

As we decided to take all replacement courses for Delft, it did eat up into our free time. The first quarter was hectic with a lot of courses and assignments. And this made use of free time effectively very essential. The Friday movie that played in an auditorium within the campus was almost ritualized. It was fun to watch movies like - Snakes on a Plane - with an audience composed entirely of undergraduate and graduated. The sports centre which was almost always teeming with people was also used whenever possible. Carnegie Mellon had a central lounge and a combined sports and cultural centre with swimming pool and outdoor stadium - making that place perfect for spending free time. The tunes of amateur guitarists and jazz players from the school of music while savouring free liquid chocolate still rings in my ears.

"I took a roadtrip on the historic Route 66 while travelling to the Grand Canyon"

Also a lot of our free time during the weekends or holidays was spent travelling. US had many of our friends, so it was great to give them a visit and also see the place. From New York and Washington on the east coast to California and Las Vegas in the west - there was a lot to explore. I took a road trip on the historic Route 66 while travelling to the Grand Canyon, something I had always wanted to do.



EXPERIENCES

AT UNIVERSITY

The culture at the university is very open. Everyone be it students or the professors are easily accessible. However some of them would expect you to make prior appointments before meetings. The staffs were also very helpful in making arrangements for our courses. We were kept on the waiting list for most of our courses initially as we did not register for them before we reached the university. Unlike Delft, at CMU courses had a limited capacity and required you to register way in advance to ensure your enrolment. The staffs were kind enough to make special arrangement to accommodate us - one of that included shifting the venue of a classroom to a bigger auditorium. Some courses required working in groups - it was a new experience for me to work in a group where some of the participants were part time students who were middle aged executives and some others were like me or younger.

THE CITY

Pittsburgh used to be an industrial town with large scale steel, aluminium and coal based industries. However the present Pittsburgh, reflects nothing of its polluted past. The city has a beautiful downtown skyline, with confluence of two rivers right in the centre. The mountainous landscape was also a welcomed change after having spent a year in the flat Netherlands. The city had a lot of students because of presence of many universities of international prominence - with large percentage of international students. It was easy to find student societies from your home country and it was fun to hang around with them. Also the city has some good places to eat and drink.