

Exchange report – NTU – Fall 2021

31. 01. 2022

I am a master's student in physics and I spent five months from October 2021 to January 2022 taking online classes at NTU.

The registration process

The registration process for classes at NTU can be a little confusing in the beginning. There are two different systems: One in which you can look for classes and register them in your personal schedule and a second one where you actually apply for classes. Make sure to carefully read the mails sent to you by the NTU exchange office and do not miss any of the deadlines. NTU students told me that there is a high chance one is not accepted into all of the classes that one applies for. Therefore, it is recommended to apply for a few more classes in the beginning and to drop the classes you do not like during the first three weeks of the semester (or ideally as soon as possible such that other people have the opportunity to take those classes).

I recommend the two afternoon time slots because these will enable you to get up reasonably late in Germany. The classes then start at 6 am to 7 am and you still have enough time to take German lectures in the afternoon.

As for the general Chinese classes (time slot in the evening), there is a separate registration process with a short oral exam and a written test. Do not worry over these. My oral examiner was very nice and just asked me some general questions related to my major and then we talked about the purpose of theoretical physics in a world with (seemingly) more burning issues.

The enhanced Chinese classes were only offered in the morning (Taiwan time) which is why I did not take them.

The classes

I initially registered for four classes: a seminar on mainland China politics after WW2, a class on trends in the Chinese economy, a seminar on climate policy making as well as a Mandarin conversation class. I really enjoyed the first two classes and followed them until the end of the semester and have to commend both of my teachers for doing a very good job. The third class was also very interesting, but then the professor decided to switch to offline-teaching only (but he said that people who were not in Taiwan should contact him and they would find a solution which did not sound too appealing to me). The Mandarin conversation class turned out to mainly address students starting to learn Mandarin which is why I also dropped it. Instead, I signed up for the International Companions for Learning program where I met with Elementary school students from Chayi county every week. Those sessions were a lot of fun and I learned many things about Taiwanese culture with the children. I hope they also enjoyed the program. Even though language-wise, I found it quite hard, I did have a very kind and helpful student from NTU by my side who helped translating. But I got the impression that without good Mandarin skills it would be rather

hard to have a proper conversation with the children. Often, I found myself struggling to understand them. In addition, the Skype connection was rather poor and there was a lot of background noise. Still, I absolutely recommend the program. Just make sure to talk to your Taiwanese partner beforehand in order to make sure they know when and how much to translate.

The general Chinese class that I took was excellent despite being held online. It was definitely the best Chinese class I have taken so far (among several classes in Heidelberg and Bonn and at the Confucius institutes in Heidelberg and Leipzig). My teacher was very motivated and we discussed interesting topics. There were many opportunities to practice conversations, but we also studied grammar and vocabulary. Fortunately, online classes do not require students to be able to write texts in Chinese by hand, but we did have handwritten vocabulary tests every lesson in fact. Make sure to schedule enough time for these classes (180 min two times a week + preparation, two essays, two oral exams and four longer written tests over a period of three months).

As for classes related to your major, I recommend contacting the respective faculty to check with them whether they can put you on a mailing list with additional seminars, workshops etc.. I was lucky enough to be able to write my master's thesis under the supervision of Prof. Tzihong Chiueh at the department of theoretical astrophysics. Within the research group, he distributed announcements for physics talks and seminars in English that I would not have known about otherwise. Make sure to ask your department about such announcements.

Would I recommend participating in the exchange program?

If you can come to Taiwan, definitely! Everyone was exceptionally nice and helpful and going to Taiwan would have certainly been a wonderful experience.

The online program on the other hand was good, but obviously not comparable. I really enjoyed the classes that I took. The ICL program probably brought me closer to Taiwan than most activities in my home country could at this moment. But I would have definitely waited for the opportunity to actually go to Taiwan were I not finishing my studies very soon.