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Wesleyan University Fall Semester 2021

I arrived at BDL airport on August 29, 2021, and was picked up by international student coordinators and the University's driving service. We got in touch beforehand through the **Wesleyan e-mail service**. I cannot stress enough how important it is to check your e-mails and set up a student account as soon as possible. At Wes, everything gets communicated through this account, and all the information you need will be provided through Google Mail.

International Student Orientation takes place for a few days before all others arrive on campus, so you'll have the chance to explore and get to know other students from all over the world. I connected to people from India, Spain, Belarus, France, China, Indonesia, and Taiwan, among many others. The International Student Office always has an open ear and sends out regular, essential updates.

Wesleyan is a university shaped by immense variety and tolerance. The student body takes critical race studies and gender diversity very seriously. In this context, it is important to keep in mind that this University is a **beautiful liberal bubble** not representative of the entire US. However, especially for members of the LGBTQ community and people who identify as part of a minority group, this University is a fantastic fit! The Resource Center and other bodies also support first-generation academics and students from low-income families. I experienced the entire community on campus as welcoming and exceptionally educated. Although barely known in Germany, Wesleyan is a very prestigious school. Apart from the immense tuition, the **academic requirements for attending the school are considerable**.

This is great on several levels because most students find a passion fitting for themselves early in life and are happy to share. I had some of the most compelling and intellectually challenging conversations with people younger than myself on this campus.

As a Liberal Arts College, the **University encourages its students to try out several fields** over their studies. Usually, students declare their major as Juniors or Seniors, meaning during their 3rd or 4th year. Until then, they take the opportunity to try out many topics that foster curiosity. Reaching from psychology, theater, and philosophy to neurobiology and astronomy (there is an observatory on campus,) you will have the chance to test out what you feel called to do. The classes are demanding yet very accessible if you are willing to put in the work.

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During the Fall Semester, I took a class on *Data Journalism* which taught me more than I could ever have imagined. I learned to write more effectively, interview officials, write articles, manage Excel sheets with thousands of rows, and create data visualizations I never thought I could build. This is only one of three full-credit classes I completed. *Introduction to Human Rights Advocacy* with James Cavallaro, an acclaimed Harvard and Stanford law professor, was one other example. He founded the University Network for Human Rights and worked on many cases fighting for dignity and the rights of oppressed individuals. In this context, I also attended a three-day human rights advocacy simulation which was incredibly exciting and insightful.

Courses are generally very hands-on and push students to directly apply the knowledge they convey. Moreover, the focus lies on creative approaches and professors value new and exciting methods over the safe already familiar option. I was amazed by how qualified and, at the same time, caring and approachable the faculty here is. I received a lot of helpful feedback and always felt like teachers and students uphold a respectful and amicable connection.

To accompany the wide variety of academic options, **dozens of clubs** are waiting for you to join. I became part of "Prometheus," an acrobatic contact staff crew that performs with fire. There are a lot of sports teams, improv and comedy clubs, art collaboration spaces, and writing communities. The offers are almost endless. I recommend you try out several things you find interesting early in the semester and commit to one or two clubs not to overwhelm yourself but, at the same time, participate in a community that will make you feel at home quickly. Apart from organized free-time options, the athletic center offers a gym and swimming pool open for all students.

If you come here for the **German Assistant Teacher position**, congratulations! You will have a lot of fun interacting with the students and developing your skills. Until 2024, the person you assist will be Iris Bork-Goldfield, one of the sweetest people I have had the pleasure of meeting so far. She is an amazing teacher and mentor and provides exceptional opportunities for learning how to teach languages. I hold four sessions with her students who started learning German this year with mostly no previous knowledge and watch them learn extremely fast, which is incredibly encouraging and rewarding. Typically, I hold four sessions for the beginners per week (5 students per session) and prepare the lessons for about 2 hours every week. My

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wage for this work is \$13 per hour. Frau Bork also provides suggestions and advice on what to practice with the students. She is a joy to work with, very generous and supportive. In fact, the entire German Department is amazing. Currently, it consists of only three professors, all of which I am very grateful to have met.

Apart from our professional relationship, I got to spend several weekends with Frau Bork and her family, took a foreign language teaching workshop with her husband, and even celebrated my first American Thanksgiving with them.

Frau Bork also made sure I had a **room in German Haus** located in an optimal spot on campus (65 Lawn Avenue, 06457 Middletown CT) with eight other students interested in the German language and culture. My room here is in a beautiful old wood-frame house with big windows and good heating during the admittedly cold winter months. In German Haus, we organize **events about once a month**, such as Oktoberfest (without beer,) German Rave, Nikolaus, or just a simple Kaffee und Kuchen. As the German “representative,” it is also my responsibility to initiate meetings with the Haus community and support our house manager in organizing these events. Great practice opportunity in team-building, problem-solving, idea-pitching, and getting a whole new view of your own culture!

The **campus** itself is gorgeous, and everything is within walking distance. Additionally, there is **free public transport** in the area with our **Wesleyan ID card**. This WesID also functions as a key card for most university buildings and as the medium for paying for food and drinks on campus. Regarding transportation to bigger cities, you can take the bus to Meriden or Hartford and, from there, get to Boston or New York (I recommend Greyhound for Boston and Amtrak for New York). Ubers are widely available, as well as rentable Zip cars to go shopping off campus. The University also provides a Shuttle that is free and works reliably. If you get the chance, I strongly recommend you buy a car for the time here as it truly makes life a lot easier. Public transport in the US is nowhere close to German standards.

Located in Middletown, the surrounding area is relatively rural, and **Wesleyan is no typical party school**. There are a few bars in town which you can enter if you are over 21 (I recommend Mezzo’s near Main Street.) Main Street itself is also known for offering a variety of great international cuisine. However, if you do not want to spend additional money, the **cafeterias**

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(especially Usdan) provide fresh and delicious dining two to three times a day which far exceeded my expectations. As a vegan, I have various options, and the offer changes daily. Due to COVID, we must take the plastic food containers with plastic cutlery. Still, German Haus has a kitchen and everything necessary to turn a takeaway meal into a proper dinner with a porcelain plate and suitable forks and knives. You can also buy Tupperware and reusable cutlery and bring them to Usdan to avoid trash where possible. Apart from Usdan, you will find several Cafes and a store (WesShop) on campus. You can pay for everything there with points on your Wesleyan Student ID.

If you ever feel like you are experiencing a hard time, feel homesick, under pressure, or isolated, be assured that Wesleyan offers an exceptional support system! Medical and psychological support is available on campus, and “MindfulWes” offers meditation, yoga sessions, and group therapies free of charge weekly.

You can generally stick to one credo here: ask, and you will be helped.

Additional advice:

- Get in touch with Jesse Torgerson (jtorgerson@wesleyan.edu) and ask him whether **staff and faculty** would be interested in continuing the **conversation classes** we started during the fall semester! It's a great source of additional income, and you will have the unique opportunity to bond with professors who already have decent German skills. I negotiated **\$87,50** for one hour of conversation class per week, including preparation time, paid by the Institute for Global Studies, so I suggest you go for that as well!
- Consider whether you want to take advantage of the University's **insurance** plan, which will cover most treatments and medication and costs about \$2,300 or waive it with f.e. ISO Student Health Insurance which costs \$746 or less.
- Be aware that, although you do not have to pay the tuition, housing, dining, books, and access to all activities on campus for the **entire academic year will add up to roughly \$20,000.**

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- Apply for a **Social Security Number and set up a bank account** in person when you arrive here so the University does not have to write you checks for a long time and you can access the money you earned (I opened mine at the Bank of America, there is also an ATM on campus)
- Get yourself a **Mint SIM card**, it has done me an excellent service, is comparably cheap, and you will have Wi-Fi essentially everywhere on campus anyway so that you won't need a whole lot of data.
- Don't be shy to **reach out to professors** whose classes you want to attend but did not get into during the initial registration period. They appreciate you are showing effort and that you care about a subject. I would advise you to attend the first session of the semester and speak to them after class and during their office hours.
- Take a **maximum of four credits** as you will also teach and want to have some free time to travel and explore.