TUM-BWL - Experience Report for Semester Abroad

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Why Brazil?
I chose Brazil, because it’s my home country and I wanted to experience university life over there. From going to FGV, one of the most renowned institutions in Latin America, I would learn a lot more about the country’s economy and about my studying area in general. After finishing university in Germany, my carrier plan is going back to Brazil to work there. Therefore, the university would teach me a lot about the Brazilian market, its socioeconomic challenges and would give me the possibility to find new opportunities for my future.

Furthermore, it is an enormous and wonderful country to explore and not just “football, samba and beaches”. Darcy Ribeiro, a famous Brazilian anthropologist, describes Brazil as being composed out of many smaller Brazils, with their own distinct cultures, histories, food, nature and language accents. Meaning, that everywhere you go, you will meet people with completely different mindsets and backgrounds. Moreover, in most of the cases, they will also be very friendly and welcoming. However, it’s important to know, that Brazil is a very unequal country and that you shouldn’t be shocked when seeing favelas in São Paulo or friends telling you to take an Uber instead of walking home by yourself at night. You have to respect the reality and by doing so you will make the most out of the experience.

Application phase
My application phase started one year before going to Brazil, in December 2018. Since my first semester I knew that I wanted to do an international semester. Therefore, I tried to inform myself as much as possible beforehand and followed all the steps described on the TUM SOMex “Going Abroad” web page. Regarding the language certificates, I did the free English DAAD certificate test at the TUM Language Center. Additionally, my Brazilian Abitur already had Portuguese as a module, which was accepted in the application. I also applied to the TUM SOM Accommodation Database, which would have been a great solution for me not having to pay for my rented apartment when staying abroad. Applications just came in, in December 2019 and, unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 situation, my selected tenant couldn’t come to Munich. However, it was not difficult to find a new tenant in Munich between friends.
I handed in my application in the beginning of January 2019 and received the acceptance 20 days later. From there on I still had to register myself on an online platform, hand in additional documents and go to a networking event with other students on April 29th. It was really helpful to clarify questions regarding the credit recognition process and differing semester times. It’s especially important for you to pay attention to the semester times and plan your semester at TUM accordingly. Two solutions that I found were doing seminars and communication skill modules in which the exams were before January 2020 and applying for a leave of absence for the summer semester of 2020.

Finally, on October 19th 2019 I received my acceptance letter from FGV EAESP. Together with it, were information regarding the student visa, application to the online system, registration for courses, language course, health insurance, internships and the welcome week. The registration for courses took place between January 3rd and 5th and it was based on a “first come first take” scheme, so don’t miss these deadlines. Personally, I didn’t need a student visa, since I’m Brazilian, but I know that other exchange students had a day where they could go together to the federal police and fulfill the needed procedures. Unfortunately, I also can’t give more information regarding the health insurance and accommodation offerings, my parents live in Brazil and I already had a Brazilian insurance.

The date of the welcome session was January 29th, exchange student from the entire world met in a room and many helpful information were presented. In the end of the day we participated in the welcome integration at the auditorium and another presentation was held. Finally, we had a cocktail with all the students, including student form the FGV. It was great to get more familiar with everyone.

**Studies**

FGV has a completely different teaching approach than the TUM School of Management. Attendance is mandatory, meaning that if you miss more than 25% of the classes, you fail the course. Classes are smaller than the ones in TUM, there are less students (about 20-30) and you have more proximity to the teacher. Additionally, at some point, of most of the modules, students will participate in group activities, prepare presentations and present them to the class. Another difference is the grading system during the semester, two main exams will take place, however other evaluations types, like tests and projects can compose your final grade. In fact, each professor has the arbitrariness to come up with his/her own grading system.
It remembered me of high school times and I enjoyed it. In my opinion, smaller classes are better than big lectures, since they allow you to perform group work more frequently, ask questions directly to the professor while he presents and learn the lecture content more efficiently. Moreover, I also appreciated the grading system, it gave you the opportunity to demonstrate your learnings more often and be recompensated by doing so, instead of having to apply all your knowledge in one big exam.

I chose three modules at FGV:

The Brazilian Economy

The module takes place during half of the semester and gives you a chronological overview of the entire economic history of Brazil. At the beginning of the semester groups are formed in order to complete different projects on economic periods. Further, classes where split between content given by the professor and group presentations.

Personally, I found the content very interesting, each economic period was well explained and class debates about certain topics were encouraged by the professor. Especially helpful for studies, was an economic timeline handout, which resumed the Brazilian economic history from the XVI century until today. However, two negative aspects were the professor’s English fluency and content repetitions throughout classes. The exam was applied online due to the COVID-19 situation, we were given multiple questions regarding different economic time periods and had to write our answers on a Word document. It was rather complex compared to the difficulty level of the class in general.

Diagnóstico Empresarial

I only recommend this module if you are comfortable with the Portuguese language. It takes place during the entire semester and is great if you want to learn more about consulting. In the first class of the semester students were divided into groups and had to choose one company with a familiar contact in it. Throughout the module we learned all the steps of a complete consultancy and applied the gained knowledge directly to the chosen company. In fact, we conducted several interviews with multiple employees from different areas and did an entire market research. In each step of the consultancy we had to present our results to the professor. The final grade was formed by the grade of all the presentations plus the recommendations to the company based on the findings.
The module was very interesting, since I could apply learnings from class directly to a company, which is rarely possible at TUM. Most of the classes were given online through Zoom (also due to COVID-19), but nevertheless, the professor was always open to questions and could rapidly give an answer by email.

Programing Logic (Phyton)

Since my technical specialization is in informatics and I had already learned Java, I also wanted to expand my knowledge to a different programing language. Phyton is, in some aspects similar to Java, which made the entire learning process much easier. Classes were way less intense than the ones at TUM, there was a lot of repetition and we didn’t go as deep into the content as we could’ve gone. However, the professor gave a good overview of all basic concepts and always had exercises prepared for praxis. The exam took place on an online platform, we had to have our cameras on all the time, there were multiple choice questions and code submission questions. Finally, I would only recommend this module if you are a beginner at programing and wants to take your first steps.

Student life

My parents house wasn’t that near to FGV so in the days where I had classes I always took a 1-hour bus to university. The bus was full, but it didn’t bother me. Other exchange students however, lived in the Bela Vista or Jardim Paulista neighborhoods and could easily go by foot to FGV.

There are three coffee places in the building and one canteen. The food was always great and fair priced, so it wasn’t necessary to leave the building in order to have lunch somewhere else. Anyway, I definitely recommend you to also try out the local restaurants across the city. Churrascarias can be a bit expensive, but they are worth the experience. In fact, FGV even organized one dinner at Fogo de Chão for the exchange students. Japanese “all you can eat” restaurants are a sensation in São Paulo and completely different than the ones you find in Germany. There is also an enormous variety of Italian restaurants, which you can visit. Yet, you should specially try out the local food. Feijoada, moqueca, pão de queijo, pastel, coxinna and açai are just some examples for you to get started.

In the first semester week you will notice many FGV party posters in the courtyard and university party events on Facebook. Not to mention the entire street carnival that will be taking place at that time. Be informed about the dates and try to buy tickets soon, because they get
expensive afterwards. Very unfortunately, again due to COVID-19, all events after carnival were canceled.

Nevertheless, something that really marked my semester were student entities. In some classes they will present themselves to the new students, which can participate in a selective process in order to also become collaborators. Since I didn’t have many classes during the week and wanted to occupy myself as much as possible, I decided to apply to 3 student entities (please notice that it is highly recommended to have a good Portuguese fluency in order to make the most out of the organizations):

Liga de Empreendedorismo (Entrepreneurship League)

At the point where I entered the League, FGV had already interrupted physical presence classes and everything was now online. In the first weeks, groups were formed and we had to peruse one business idea to create our own startup. Each week we had lessons with highly successful entrepreneurs about choosing the right market, “minimum viable product”, product development, revenue models, “go to market” and “product market fit”. After the lessons we had to apply our learnings to the business model and present the results. In the end of the semester all new startups creators presented a pitch for possible investors, it was an incredible experience.

During the semester we also had constant Zoom conversations with famous entrepreneurs, marketing professionals, financial market specialists and venture capital employees. They told us their stories and we could ask as many questions as we wanted. This was probably one of the high points of my exchange program.
Furthermore, each member could choose areas in the student entity to be part of. I was part of the internal management and ENACTUS. At the internal management we created new projects for the league and made connection to other student entities, and at ENACTUS we encouraged and perused socially responsible entrepreneurship. I will highlight one project at ENACTUS called “Projeto Caju”, the purpose was to offer job opportunities to vulnerable seamstresses. They produced masks, we sold them through an e-commerce and reverted all the money raised back to the production.

FGVTech (FGV Technology student entity)

Very similar to the TUM-BWL objective, FGVTech’s objective is to develop professionals who will be a bridge between management and developers. Therefore, they offered a complete Phyton course, in which we dived deeper into the content than we did at the Programming Logic module. We also had Zoom meetings with Big Data Analytics professionals, which could answer questions and gave me a big insight into the market. Additionally, members prepared business cases on UX and UI (user experience and user interface) for the new members to work on and prepare a resolution. In fact, we even participated in a case contest offered by ZX ventures, innovation group of Anheuser-Busch InBev. From the experience that I have gained participating in these cases I can conclude that this was another high point of my semester.
Moreover, I was able to establish a solid relationship between FGVTech and the Entrepreneurship League. We offered digital marketing, UX and UI consulting solutions to the startups in return for the experience and their feedback.

Liga de Gestão Esportiva (Sport-management League)

In the first month, groups of new members were formed with the objective of consulting and improving processes of the student entity. This way members would get more familiar with the different areas and their tasks. My team focused on the capacitation process of members and developed an entire semester plan on sport management coaching to better capacitate all collaborators. In addition, we also had regular Zoom meetings with important sport management professionals, which told us their carrier stories and gave us great insights into the market.

Concluding, all three student entities had incredible, highly dedicated, motivated and friendly students. I made many new connections and learned a lot from everyone.

Final Word

Firstly, I want to thank the TUM School of Management International Office Team and the FGV Office for Global Affairs for the opportunity and for making this exchange semester
possible, thank you for the organization and openness. Even during difficult COVID-19 times I was able to make the most out of this semester. Now imagine if COVID-19 wouldn’t have existed, if you have the chance to do one semester abroad at FGV, do it! You will be fascinated. Brazil is an amazing country and São Paulo its multicultural center.