



Baden-Württemberg
STIPENDIUM

BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG-STIPENDIUM FOR STUDENTS

PERSONAL REPORT

Please upload your testimonial to the online portal of the *Baden-Württemberg-STIPENDIUM*, BWS-World, at the latest four weeks after your scholarship stay has ended. Please use the box labelled "personal report" in the documents section of your personal profile. You can send Word or PDF files; the file size should not exceed 4 MB.

If you have any questions, please contact the international office of your university or write to studierende@bw-stipendium.de.

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Host university: Hochschule Offenburg

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- I hereby agree to my personal report being published on the websites of the *Baden-Württemberg-STIPENDIUM* (www.bw-stipendium.de) and of the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung (www.bwstiftung.de).

- I hereby agree to my personal report being published on the websites of the Offenburg University of Applied Sciences (<http://incoming.hs-offenburg.de/austauschstudierende-sonderprogramme/>)

My name is Igor Neres Trindade and I have been granted a scholarship for the last five months. My exchange program finishes now and, as a form of gratitude, I write this report to share my experiences. In the following lines, I shall cover every aspect of my stay in Germany, from the preparations to the daily life.

Everything started with the announcement of this opportunity by the International Office of my university with a presentation of the Hochschule Offenburg given by two students that were in an exchange program in 2017. One of these students was a scholarship holder. The presentation covered their experiences in Offenburg and all the aspects of studying at the Hochschule Offenburg. From that moment on, I knew Offenburg was the right decision, and I had to apply for it, as my university would select four students, according to their GPA, to indicate to the Hochschule Offenburg for the scholarship. Fortunately, I was one of the four chosen students. In the very next day, I had to provide a set of documents to continue the process: an application form, a curriculum vitae with photo, a motivation letter, a recommendation letter, a proof of matriculation, a transcript of records, the ECTS Learning Agreement and a recommendation letter from any professor I had experience with. The International Office of my home university was very kind to provide also a recommendation letter.

A few days after it, I received an e-mail from the exchange coordinator of the Hochschule Offenburg, Lidija Rottenecker. I had to register online with the Baden Württemberg Foundation, fill in the requested personal data and upload the obligatory documents in order to complete the application process. A week later, I applied online for the Hochschule Offenburg, and within one month I got the notification of my scholarship. The process was fast, and I had total support from both universities. My future host university was looking very much forward to welcome the exchange students there.

I always had the dream of studying abroad, and this dream finally came true. I cannot express all the feeling I had when I received the news. I got a new opportunity, an opportunity to know a new culture, to grow personally and professionally. Thus, this would be my first experience studying abroad, living by myself.

Before traveling to Germany, I had to choose my accommodation, and it was easier than I thought it would be, as Hochschule Offenburg has a department that takes care of it. Two kinds of renting were available: private accommodation and student residence. For staying closer to the university and the other students, I chose the student residence. With everything set, I transferred the value of the first month of rent plus a security deposit. Money exchange for the first month was the next step.

My experience abroad started on the 28th of August in Frankfurt with three colleagues. They also studied at the Federal University of ABC and would stay for a semester at the Hochschule Offenburg. For us, everything was so different and new. We were used to the chaotic identity of the city of São Paulo. Somehow

Frankfurt was very different, and Offenburg even more, as I shall later report. More than that, I was in a country whose language I did not speak very well. It was a real challenge. People, however, were kind and patient, and I had help and support from my colleagues. After staying a few days in Frankfurt, we went straight to Offenburg on a very pleasant trip.

Arriving in Offenburg was also a great experience. Hochschule Offenburg has a *buddy system*, which selects students to help the incoming students in their first weeks. Eugen, my buddy, was waiting for us at the train station and kindly offered us a ride to our apartment. His support was of great importance: he helped us get to know the city, open the bank account and contract a German Health Insurance. Also, we arrived on Saturday afternoon, and we did not know supermarkets closed on Sunday in Germany. We made many other discoveries as time passed.

One of the many nice features of the Winter Semester at the Hochschule Offenburg was the opportunity of attending an *Intensive German Summer Course* that took place in September. It was a fantastic experience. More than just learning German, it was a moment of meeting new people and knowing new cultures. Also, in this same course, several trips were included. We went to Waldkirch and Heidelberg, we made a wine Tour around Gengenbach, and we even had a movie night with the classic German movie *Honig Im Kopf*. It is amazing how fast I managed to speak German. Although my level was still basic, I was able to go to the market and speak only in German. By the end of the course, I met people from many countries: India, Spain, Taiwan, the Philippines, Poland, and even other Brazilians! Internationalization is a characteristic of Hochschule Offenburg. It is incredible how diverse the university is and how we can learn from it.

After the Summer Course finished, I felt more prepared to deal with daily problems. I was more confident to speak in German. With the start of the semester, there were several meetings to explain how the university worked. Also, a professor, Tom Rüdibusch, was in charge of helping us with the Learning Agreement. This way, we could find the classrooms of the select subjects. We were also able to change the Learning Agreement, selecting other classes. Before the classes started, we had a trip to Friedrichshafen, as part of an Integration Weekend, to get to know our future classmates and to have *Intercultural Competence* classes.

Many were the experiences I had that I could write this report even longer. Hochschule Offenburg played an important role in caring so much about cultural activities. International students had the chance to go to great places like the Mercedes-Benz Museum, in Stuttgart, and to Oberstdorf, in a snow tour. There were *Sprachencafés* every month, where students could practice different languages. One of my favorite

activities was the *International Evening*. International students had the chance to make a presentation about their own countries and also make typical foods. I learned a lot and even cooked with my Brazilian colleagues!

Another special aspect of studying in Offenburg is having the support of the *Senior Service*, a group of seniors that interacted with us during get-togethers arranged by the university. We played golf with them, tried different cakes and practiced the German language. I even found a couple, Eva and Franz, that invited me to a *Weihnachtskaffee*. Franz surprisingly spoke Portuguese. Another senior, also called Franz, helped me get my first bicycle. They played an important role in my stay. I have to emphasize the importance of all these activities, as they strengthened my relationships with the other students. Having friends is important, especially when we are far from home. Living in a student residence also helped me be closer to the other students.

The Hochschule Offenburg has a very good infrastructure, with excellent classrooms and labs, and outstanding teaching staff. There are several spaces reserved for bike parking, and it is very easy to go from one building to another one. The professors were very attentive and concerned about the learning process of the students. They were always asking for feedback from the students. This is really important to maintain the teaching quality.

The German academic system is very different from the Brazilian one. In Brazil, the professor is usually free to choose the assessment methods, and very often students have to take two exams. There are also professors that ask for one little project, according to the subject, even if there is no lab. Attending classes in Brazilian universities is, by standard, mandatory and very often there are mandatory exercise lists. Vacation takes place only when the period of classes finishes. At the Hochschule Offenburg, attending classes is optional as the enrollment is made only for the exams. There was also a little period of vacation of three weeks within the semester. The assessment method was also very different: all the courses had only one exam in the end, covering the content of the whole semester.

By the end of the exchange program, I realized a pattern concerning the exams: the students have little time to do a very extensive test. As a consequence, in some cases, I was not able to answer everything even though I knew how to answer the remaining questions. The reason for it may be related to the fact of preparing for the exams. There seems to be a habit of getting automatic when answering any questions. On the one hand, this is good: the students try to learn very deeply and answer almost automatically any questions. On the other hand, the reason for studying a subject may lose its meaning, as students are always concerned about preparing for the exams. It happens everywhere: the Federal University of ABC is not an

exception. Measuring the effectiveness of the actual assessment system is of utmost importance. A continuous performance assessment, for example, through small projects, is a good alternative.

My experiences at the Hochschule Offenburg were exceptional. I had a great personal and academic development, developed many intercultural skills, met many people that influenced me in many ways and made friendships I could not imagine. The Baden-Württemberg Stipendium had a really important role. It was more than I thought it would be: the BWS is a very complex platform, with many features. It is not simply a scholarship, it is a complete experience and allows scholarship holders to interact with each other, through trips, get-togethers, and meetings. I learned a lot from the German culture and history from its trips. I had also the opportunity to see heavy snow for the first time in my life, in Feldberg. Also, the International Office was cooperating with the BWS to strengthen the relationships between the scholarship holders of the Hochschule Offenburg. Susanne Ziemer and Tatiana Shakhtyr, from the International Office, coordinated a trip to Freiburg for a surprising tour around the city with an actress explaining the history and culture of the place.

In addition to a rich Culture, Germany is a place full of technology and engineering. It is a society that works very well in many aspects. The quality of life is good, especially in Offenburg: there are parks, cinemas, and everything is so close that there is no need for a car: people can do everything by bicycle. German effectiveness is also an outstanding characteristic: I was surprised, for example, by how fast the cashiers were in my first time at the market. Germans do follow the rules very strictly and are very respectful. The result? A very safe place to live. It is also in the heart of Europe, and traveling to any other country is easy and fast. However, you do not need to leave Germany to enjoy your stay: there is a lot of festivals, like the *Freiheitsfest*, the *Oktoberfest* and *Karneval*!

By the end of this exchange program, when I look to myself, I see a totally different person. Indeed, I had a great academic development. I had the opportunity to attend unique elective classes, such as *Rhetorics* and *Intercultural Competence*. I also managed to improve my English skills, and I learned German. *Ja, jetzt kann ich ein bisschen Deutsch sprechen und verstehen!* I met amazing people, learned a lot from them and taught a lot of my culture. And most important... I realized the importance of human interaction. The person I am today is the result of the influence of everybody in my life so far... and every little interaction has its importance. I realized that especially for learning so much with such diversity and recognizing my influences on people, even on the slightest thing, like a smile.

My report here finishes and, for this last paragraph, I would like to thank the people that made this possible. Besides family and friends, this would not be possible without the Baden Württemberg Foundation and both of the universities and their staffs. I am really grateful for having this experience. **Vielen Dank!**



Vineyard Tour



Hiking Tour to Müller's Mühle



Kaffeeklatsch with the Senior Service and the international students



Snowshoe Tour with BWS scholarship holders



Get-together with BWS scholarship holders



View of Heidelberg from the Castle



Trip to Schauinsland with two special friends



Christmas Celebration in Gengenbach



Get-together of international students in Strasbourg



The beautiful Karnival of Offenburg



The first Bratwurst of many



Weihnachtskaffe with Franz and Eva-Maria, and some friends