IT University Travel Report

**Host University:** Georgia Institute of Technology

**Study Program at IT University:** Digital Media and Design

**Exchange Agreement or Study Abroad:** Exchange Agreement

**Courses studied abroad:**

1. **Semester:** Intro to Media Studies (LCC 2400), Intro to Computational Media (LCC 2700), Principles of Visual Design (LCC 2720) and Experimental Media and Digital Art (LMC 4730/6318).

2. **Semester:** Representing Structure and Behavior (CS1316), Interactive Product Design (ID 3510/8900), User Interface Design (CS/Psych 3750) and Principles of Interaction Design (LCC 3710).

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**My study abroad**

The first semester at Georgia Institute of Technology (GT) was at first very confusing, and the courses were limited to a small list we had received in a text document prior to our arrival. This is reflected in the courses you see above, as I applied for the standard courses in LCC/LMC (Related to the Computational Media, CM, major). However in the second semester I had more experience, why I started to explore the great amount of possibilities they had at GT. With a direct exchange program it is easy to apply for courses that are out of the standard GT curriculum, meaning that we with the consent of ITU were able to choose courses from a lot of different majors (Computer Science, Industrial Design etc.).
Studying at GT is a whole different experience than what you would get in Denmark. They focus a lot on achieving, meaning that they do a lot of tests, quizzes, papers and they give you a lot of possibilities to earn extra credit etc. Throughout the semester you will (of course it varies with the courses) be very busy doing a lot of different assignments. However when it comes to finals/exams, you will most likely find it a lot more relaxing than what you would experience at ITU, since you have been studying hard throughout the year and the actual final only counts a certain percentage of your final grade (this could be 10-15%). In some cases you would not even have a final, as the course grade would be determined through a semester average, meaning that you will be graded on most of the stuff you turn in throughout the semester.

Why study abroad?
Experience and network was what convinced me to study abroad. Networking would probably be the only thing I really never got to do, as it was rather hard to meet and connect with people in the courses you were taking. This would probably be the side-effect of large classes, a huge campus and a very big selection of courses. You would rarely have more than 1 class with the same people, meaning you only have those 50 min every class to get some connection started. Again this was also one of the upsides of GT, as you would be in classes with people of all sort of different backgrounds and skill levels. The experience I got from studying abroad is something I would never forget, as this was both teaching about myself and my career.

What did I get from studying abroad?
Through a big diverse combination of classes, I gathered a lot more technical knowledge than I have had before. Studying abroad gave a new perspective to the different design methods being taught in both USA and Denmark. It was learning to hear how some professors would refer to certain User-Centered design methods as a 'Scandinavian Approach', as the approach for me at least seemed to be the way to do it, without considering that culture and much more affects the different approaches.

A big difference is also the social aspect. I found it to be centered on different activities: School work, sports or different interests. It is not a life like it is on ITU where people would go home around 16:00 and meet the next day for classes, people would stay at the libraries until the late hours and most of the campus would be crowded all the time. Nor is it a place where people would go out for a drink 1-2 times a week, they would rather spend their weekends on trips doing stuff (in my case I went on climbing trips several weekends).
Arranging my stay

It was a very chaotic process at first, but as soon as you get connected with the right people at Georgia Tech and current / previous students, you quickly realize that it is not as bad as it seems.

Prior my leave of Denmark I had not looked in to many of the available Georgia Tech resources, as I was busy applying for the school and a lot of paper work (VISA etc.) had to be prepared. However for the 2. semester of my stay it became clear that they have a rather detailed resource database, that was almost hidden in their large intranet (http://buzzport.gatech.edu).

Accommodation

Accommodation was the practicality I was the most concerned about, since I was going to stay there for a whole year. My choice was to live on campus, as I was kind of guaranteed a certain quality level, but the price was also in correlation with that. The GT campus is fairly big (even though in US standards it’s small.), so there is a lot of different housing opportunities. Choosing the iHouse will guarantee you a social aspect that can be hard to find anywhere else, but as a downside you will live in a rather crummy environment. I also saw it as a downside that you would only live with International students, as my goal of going to the US was to experience the American culture and therefore American people.

Should I do something different in regards of housing, I would have looked in to it as early as possible, so I would have had a chance to know who my roommates were. Luckily they were great, but GT has a good system for matchmaking students, if you apply before all of the housing deadlines. An other good opportunity would be to live off-campus, but this requires a bit more work and it can be hard to find your roommates.

I’ve heard recommendations of the following:

Midtown : http://www.100midtown.com/
The flats : http://theflatsatlanticstation.com/

Also a side note to living off-campus, you would probably have to get a bicycle or at least not have a problem taking the bus every morning. Buses do however leave all the time, so that should not be too big a concern.

**Expenses and Financing**

Consider your finances before leaving. There is a lot of hidden fees that you don't see at first: VISA, insurance, vaccines / various medical tests, study materials (books, clickers etc.) and the fact that on-campus housing requires you to pay the rent upfront for each semester. It is a lot of money that you have to show from day 1, but I also experienced that the general living expense is a lot lower. Eating out, buying clothes and gadgets are definitely perks of living in the US compared to Denmark.

To help covering the expenses I applied for a lot of scholarships, but unfortunately as a Bachelor Student it was rather hard to find any that I was eligible to get. I was lucky to find some scholarships that were granted to people from my hometown, which supported me with Kr 10.000,- to my living costs; Moreover ITU's 'rejsepuljen' helped me covering some of the travel expenses.

**Recommendations for other students**

One important recommendation would be to get a good insurance before you leave, so you can waive the student insurance at the university you are going to. At GT it was required to pay about $567,- each semester, to get their mandatory student insurance. This was able to be refunded by sending in a waiver, stating that our Danish insurance was sufficient enough to cover the same things as their student insurance.

An other recommendation would be to find a community of your interest, to make the social aspect of studying abroad a lot more pleasant. GT had a lot of different sport clubs, which all are funded by the university, meaning that they have a lot of resources to get cool gear and go on trips with the members. Even if there's no interest in sport, you would almost always be able to find some community that shared the same interests.

Use the great possibilities you are given at a campus like GT. It is a famous and prestigious university, which means they have a lot of facilities available on the campus. This being in a broad range of developer labs, 3d printing, laser cutting and much more.