

GEARE Switzerland: Purdue Student Advice

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Cohort Profiles

2017 Cohort

§ Marisa Dowling

Austin, Texas, USA

- Major: Biomedical Engineering
- Language: German
- Study Abroad: ETH Zuerich(Spring), Universitaet Stuttgart(Summer)
- Domestic Internship: Express Scripts, St. Louis, Missouri, USA
- International Internship: Integer, Aura im Sinngrund, Bavaria, Germany
- Community Engagements: Alpha Eta Mu Beta, Biomedical Engineering Society Mentoring Program, Women in Engineering Pair Mentoring Program
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Washington, Indiana, USA

- Major: Computer Engineering
- Language: German
- Study Abroad: ETH Zuerich (Spring)
- Domestic Internship: Delphi Automotive, Kokomo, Indiana, USA
- International Internship: NTB Buchs, Buchs, Switzerland
- Community Engagements: Women in Engineering, InterVarsity
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Pre-Departure

Learning Languages:

Switzerland has four national languages and the language spoken is based on the region of the country. The languages, in order of use, are German, French, Italian, and Romansh. However, it is important to know that while a region may speak one language, the other languages will also be present. Below is a map of the country based on the most spoken language there.



German:

§ 2017 Cohort:

The people speak Swiss German, not High German. No matter how much German you know you won't go there understanding everything, unless you have explicitly learned Swiss German. Most people that speak Swiss German, also speak High German, because that is what is taught in school. So generally it is easier to communicate with the younger generations, as they have

learned more languages. In spite of this difficulty, knowing how to speak German is important and makes communication easier and less stressful. Getting as much experience as possible with German is key. There is a good summer study abroad program at University of Stuttgart to begin or continue learning German. The semester before leaving it is good to take the German conversation class. It is essentially no work, but makes you more comfortable simply speaking German.

French:

NA

Italian:

NA

Application and Registration to the University:

There are several different study abroad opportunities in Switzerland. This guidebook includes all of the ones that have been taken by GEARE students so far.

ETH Zuerich:

§ 2017 Cohort:

For Biomedical Engineering (BME) students, it is a three part process and for everyone else it is a two part process. BME students must first apply to the BME study abroad board for approval; this part usually takes place end of May to the beginning of June of sophomore year. Once two BMEs are selected to go to ETH, the process is the same for all of the majors. There is a study abroad application through Purdue, with letters of recommendations and some essays. This application is due September 15th. If you are not a BME student you can apply for the ETH credits to transfer back as pass or no pass, which is highly recommended. From there Purdue selects 4 students to go to ETH. They are then contacted by Sandra Zweifel to begin the ETH application. One of the main steps in this process is the visa application. For U.S. citizens, there is a paper that she emails us that needs to be filled out. She provide instructions on what needs to be filled out. The main part of that is selecting the correct Swiss consulate in the U.S. to send the paperwork and your passport. Another very important step is to immediately apply for housing through their website, WOKO. Housing is very very expensive in Zuerich and throughout Switzerland and they have very limited housing. The rest of steps are pretty straight forward and have clear deadlines posted on the site. You will be advised to sign up for a two week intensive language course. The application opens in January and the class is in February. It is strongly recommended as it is a good way to meet other exchange students and learn the ropes.

Picking a Flight:

§ 2017 Cohort:

Flying a few weeks before classes start is always a good idea, because it gives you time to get adjusted and more time to travel. Have a general time of when you would like to depart and return when booking the tickets. It is much cheaper to buy a two way ticket than a one way, especially since the price of plane tickets rises in the summer. It is also cheaper to buy tickets

from sites such as kayak or expedia, just be sure to check the baggage policy of the airline to be sure of your final ticket price. Furthermore, fly in on a weekday as it allows you to easily setup all of the important arrival procedures. Also note that if you land on a Sunday most stores will be closed unless you are at the airport or main train station.

Packing:

§ 2017 Cohort:

I recommend only taking one large suitcase and carry-ons. You want to have room for things that you buy abroad, this may mean bringing two suitcases back. If you have a lot of luggage it can be really expensive and it is also a nuisance to get from the airport to your apartment if you have a lot of luggage. Therefore, it is best to pack light and only bring essentials. You can always buy bedding and other necessary materials when you arrive. Bring clothes that are versatile and can be worn in various seasons. It is also a good idea to bring some dress clothes if you are planning to work abroad.

Arrival Tips

Registration with the City:

§ 2017 Cohort:

When moving inside of Switzerland, you are legally required to register in the city where you will be living within 7 days of arriving. You must go to a specific Kreisbüro to register depending where you live and you need to take a copy of your lease. You will also need to bring a matriculation form. This is a form saying that you are taking classes in Switzerland for the semester. Therefore, you must first go to the university to pick up the form. They give you a packet of general arrival information and tell you where to go to register. You need to pay about 200 Swiss Francs to register, if you are not an EU citizen. They will ask you if you want a form to open a bank account and if you are even kind of interested in opening a bank account get the form. If you don't get it then you will need to pay 30 Swiss Francs later for the form. Before you leave Switzerland, you must de-register.

Swiss Health Insurance:

§ 2017 Cohort:

Getting health insurance for stays longer than 3 months is required, and the insurance Purdue offers does not work in Switzerland. Within the first 3 months of your stay you need to apply for health insurance and send in proof to the Canton where you live. ETH has an information session on how to apply for health insurance at the beginning of the semester, and for more information you can visit this site: <https://www.ethz.ch/en/studies/international-immigration-housing/health-insurance.html>.

Every month you need to pay for the insurance. There are two main ways to pay for it; through the post office or by opening a bank account and paying through that.

Opening a Bank Account:

§ 2017 Cohort:

As previously stated, opening a bank account is by no means required to live in Switzerland. Insurance, rent, and phone bill can be through the post office. Furthermore, if you receive a scholarship through the school you also get it in cash. The perks of having a bank account come from not carrying large sums of money in cash and having a good place to transfer money to if necessary. You need a paper as proof of registration, a matriculation form, and your passport. As an American citizen, you need to go to the main office and make an appointment to open a bank account. This is because you have to sign papers giving them permission to share information with the IRS if requested. UBS is one of the best banks and opening an account as a student is free. However, if you open an account you have to close it before you leave or they will have to start charging you for having a swiss bank account and not living in Switzerland.

Mobile Phones & Plans:

§ 2017 Cohort:

It is probably best to get a prepaid option. For this, be sure that you have an unlocked phone with a GSM frequency used in Switzerland. Most Swiss people use WhatsApp in place of texting, so having a plan with more data is better. The most popular phone companies are Sunrise and Swisscom. Swisscom has better service coverage, but Sunrise is more affordable. You will need your passport on you in order to get a prepaid SIM card for Switzerland. If you plan on traveling a lot outside of Switzerland, it is good to have a second SIM card for the entire EU as international fees on swiss cards are very expensive.

Train Passes:

§ 2017 Cohort:

If you want to travel within Switzerland, it is a good idea to get train passes to help lower the costs. The Half-fare card lets you ride trains in Switzerland at half price. There is also the gleis7 that allows you to take trains after 7pm for free. Both of these are yearly passes, but they lower the costs significantly. For more information on these look on sbb.ch. If you are living in Zurich it is also a good idea to get a monthly ZVV pass. This pass allows you to use transportation for a specified zone(s) within Zurich for a month, the half-fare card also adds a discount to this pass. It is also a good idea to download the sbb app, because it has the train schedule and you can buy tickets directly from their. For travel outside of Switzerland, a Eurorail pass is a good investment. However, these passes can only be shipped to non-European addresses and therefore, must be ordered prior to leaving the U.S. Another good investment is if you know you are traveling a lot inside of a country that isn't Switzerland, also buying that country's version of a Half-fare card.

Survival Abroad

Budgeting:

§ 2017 Cohort:

Everything in Switzerland is more expensive, especially in Zuerich. Below is an approximate breakdown of the costs of living in Zuerich per month. This is just a rough estimate as a lot changes based on housing cost and insurance choices. It is best to work off of this budget and prepare to spend the maximum.

- Study materials (books, chemicals, ...): CHF 50.- to CHF 100.-, depending on the field of study
 - Excursions: up to approx. CHF 50.-
 - Room rent: CHF 450.- to CHF 850.- (or more)
 - Food (if using ETH facilities): approx. CHF 500.-
 - ZVV Public transport (buses, trams and trains within the city of Zurich): approx. CHF 61.- to 90.- (depending on age)
 - Health insurance: between CHF 100.- and CHF 200.- (does not apply to European Health Insurance Card holders, see tab Health insurance)
- Total: ca CHF 1,400.- per month

This number seems big and worrying. However, with the help of Purdue moves and potential scholarship from ETH it is easier. The best thing to do is set up some type of balance sheet before you leave and fill it out as you go and keep it updated. There are also smart phone apps that are free to download that can also help. It also helps a lot if you take turns cooking with your friends rather than going out to eat often.

Setting Goals:

§ 2017 Cohort:

The best way to ensure you make the most of your study abroad is to set goals. You need to decide what you find important that you do each month. It is key, not only to enjoying your time and saving money, but success in your classes. The main ones are trips you want to take, things you want to learn/experience, and when you are going to study for the exams. The trips and experiences are definitely the most fun and generally the easiest to make. The exam studying is key, because exams are your entire grade in many classes and they don't tell you when to begin studying.

Exam Information:

§ 2017 Cohort:

ETH has 2 different types of exams, end-of-semester exams and session exams. For the spring semester, end-of-semester exams occur at the beginning of June. Session exams occur in August. If the session exam occurs within one week before Purdue classes begin, you have the opportunity to prepone the exam, which will be an oral exam, or take a distance exam. This choice often depends on your professor. If you plan on having an internship over the summer and will not be in the country for one of your exams, it is important to note that ETH does not accept this as an excuse unless you can provide information saying the internship is something you are required to do for your major.

Work/Research Specific Tips

Finding an Internship:

§ 2017 Cohort:

Finding an internship is very difficult. Something that is important to know is that as a non-EU citizen, a work visa is essentially impossible. The best way to get an internship if that is what you want is to find one in other countries. Depending on the language you learned impacts the best country to go to. Learning German means that Germany is obviously the best choice. Finding an internship in a country you don't live in is also extremely difficult. There is a group called Cultural Vistas. They run a large number of programs with the intent of finding internships for American students (both U.S. citizens and international students) in other countries. There is a specific one for Germany, involving already speaking a decent amount of German. These various programs assist with creating country specific and appropriate resumes. They reach out to potential companies for you and get responses. These programs cost, however, can be reimbursed by GEARE and these programs can also provide scholarships for those in need. One important point to understand about these programs is that you are still the best person to find good companies for yourself. Once you are accepted into these programs, you should look for companies in your country of interest and send the program a list of them. This ensures they are reaching out to companies you like and hopefully, you get an internship in something that interests you.

Finding a Research:

§ 2017 Cohort:

Finding a research position will be easier than finding an internship because you don't need to get a work visa. IAESTE is a company that helps people find internships and research positions abroad in several different countries. Also, there is a university in Buchs Switzerland that has taken in a few Purdue students called NTB Buchs. It is also a good idea to look into universities in Germany. The timeline for getting a position is usually later compared to the US, so it's important to be patient. However, Joe does a really good job of letting you know about potential research opportunities.