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Program at TAU: MBA, major in financial management

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Exchange term: Fall 18 (September 18 – December 18)

Ann Arbor and the University of Michigan

The University of Michigan, located in Ann Arbor, is one of the top public universities in the US, and its business school and MBA program are rated high within the list of top 10 for many years now, alongside some of the top public schools in the country.

Ann Arbor is a lovely, laid back mid-western town, that takes a huge pride in being home for the university. It is rare to find a university of such magnitude in a relatively small town, which makes it safe to say that it feels as though the university and the town are a single entity. Ann Arbor is often rated as one of the top places to live in America, and is the most highly educated town in the US by a huge gap.

The town center has local shops, cafes and restaurants, and there are hardly any of the well-known brands to be found (No McDonald's around). If you are looking for those, you can find them around the shopping centers and malls in the outskirts of town, alongside with all the other stores and brands you're used to seeing in America.

Ann Arbor is also home to some of the best college sports teams, and sports taken very seriously, as covered later-on. The first and most essential thing you will probably learn on your first day in campus is the Michigan cheer (Go Blue!), and even outside of campus you'll find it hard to go for over 10 seconds without seeing the iconic block M logo somewhere around you.

As for the weather, summers can get surprisingly warm, so if you arrive for the fall semester you will probably get to experience some very hot days before it becomes cooler, so be sure to bring short pants and tank tops along with your fur coats. However, it does get EXTREMELY cold by mid-December, so make sure to make the proper arrangements – bring your warmest clothes with you.

Courses and registration

The courses I took during the semester were the following:

- Management Presentations (BCOM 561), Prof. Nancy Kotzian – This class will provide you with tools to effectively deliver a presentation. It is surprisingly challenging to deliver a presentation in a language other than your native tongue, even when you have very high control of it, and so this is a great opportunity to practice it.
- Visual Basic for Excel (TO 515), Prof. Hila Etzion – This course is invaluable to anyone who works in finance or uses Excel intensively. It is super effective and will acquire you a strong sense of competence and ability to provide solutions to recurring jobs in Excel.
- Private Equity Finance (FIN 624), Prof. David Brophy – this course will introduce you to the world of Private Equity funds, lead you through various mega buyout transactions and end in a final project in which you and your classmates will devise a buyout deal to take over an actual company, and pitch it to board of PE's in a prize-winning contest.
- Venture Capital Finance (FIN 623), Prof. David Brophy – This class will introduce you to the world of VC funds. It is a very important class to take if you see yourself developing in the VC industry, or if you are a founder or entrepreneur who wants to know how to better negotiate over the terms of investments in your company.
- Persuasive skills (BCOM 523), Prof. Sarah Zimmerman – This Course, which is one of the most demanded and recommended ones in the MBA program, will provide you with tools to deliver effective messages and drive workers, colleagues and managers to get behind your leadership. The class professor is one of the most inspiring lecturers I had a chance to meet.
- Mobile Innovation Development (To 626), Prof. Sanjeev Kumar – This course will lead you through early steps of developing an Android App. It is very demanding for anyone who has no previous background, and you achieve a relatively basic level at the end of it, so unless you intend to continue pursuing this skill you might want to reconsider taking it.
- Bargaining & Influence skills (MO 512) – This course will provide you with basic tools for conducting negotiations, and in every single class you will get the opportunity to actively practice your negotiating skills with a counterpart and improve them dramatically throughout the course.

An important thing to know is that whoever completes 12 credit points during the semester is considered a University of Michigan Alumnus, so you definitely can and should aspire to achieve that.

Also note that as of 2018-9, the class registration system is very outdated, and you should have a great amount of patience when dealing with it. Sign into classes as soon as registration opens in order to avoid being wait-listed. Be advised that classes which are on waiting list **will not** automatically sign you in when they become available, and you should

actively do it once you receive the message that they became available; that is also the reason why you should start following your umich mailbox as soon as it becomes available, because several critical messages are delivered on it before the semester begins.

If by the beginning of the semester you are still wait-listed for the classes of your choice, make sure to attend the first class, as there are always no-shows who's seats are automatically given to those who do attend.

Housing

Decently priced housing in Ann Arbor is extremely hard to find, especially for the fall semester. Since most landlords and student complexes only offer contracts for the full year, places that offer short term leases are hard to find and charge quite a premium for it. It is sometimes effective to wait out and not to sign too long in advance, as some places don't fill up and are then discounted as the semester approaches; That is however quite risky as you can find yourself homeless right before the semester begins. Some people rent with Airbnb or a hotel room for the first few days and only start looking for a permanent place on the ground after they get to Ann Arbor.

Leasing a room in a private house is usually less costly and much more flexible in terms of leasing periods, but the tradeoff is usually in living a little further away from campus. However, if you're lucky (like I was) it can be a wonderful opportunity to make friends with local people who are not necessarily university students.

Transportation

Using your student card (the M card) you can ride the busses around town for free. However, their schedule is somewhat irregular, and the lines are not very efficient, sometimes having to switch lines at the transit center and wait for 15 minutes for what should have been a short ride. Nonetheless, the busses are an effective way to get to the shopping centers and supermarkets on the outskirts of town when you need to carry bags with you.

Another option is to use Uber/Ryde, which is available at all times of day and is relatively inexpensive.

As for me, I purchased a second-hand bicycle on Craigslist before the semester started and used it throughout the semester – from late August to mid-December. Even as temperatures dropped, it was still quite feasible for commuting. Busses also allow you to load your bike in front of the bus, so you can take it with you as you hop on and off the bus as well.

Social Activities

The University offers a variety of clubs for various activities. There are business school clubs and University clubs, and not all of them are open for exchange students who only come for one semester, but that could be negotiable. Among the University clubs you can find a club for basically every activity you can imagine, from Indian cooking to Korean drumming, from hiking and rock climbing to aviation. It is highly recommended to join one or more of these clubs, as they are one of the best ways to socialize with people outside of the academic schedule. It is also a good idea to attend the club fair that takes place on campus in the beginning of the year. As for Ross clubs, they tend to be more business oriented, and offer you a chance to network with people who are drawn to the same industries as you.

Another social activity worth mentioning is MBA on Thursdays at the Scorekeepers bar ('Skeepz'). This is probably your best chance to socialize with the non-foreign students, who are typically not very outgoing, but tend to open-up over a few pints of beer – don't miss out on that opportunity.

Sports and concerts

As mentioned earlier, locals and students take sports very seriously, and you should too if you wish to assimilate. Don't miss a football game in the largest active sports stadium in the world, it's a once in a lifetime experience. I wouldn't recommend purchasing season tickets however, unless you're an absolute addict – tickets are almost always available from other students who did purchase season tickets but couldn't attend. If you take the winter semester, you should attend some of the basketball matches, which is also one of the sports attractions U-M has to offer.

Many artists perform around the Midwest, so try looking for concerts and book tickets in advance.

Monetary issues

The University of Michigan works in association with PNC Bank and offers its students a zero-fee bank account for six years. PNC is very common throughout the Midwest, and also has branches in most major cities such as New York, so it's not worth the trouble of opening an account in any other bank.

Transferring money from Israel takes a while (sometimes up to two weeks) and is quite costly, so it's worth starting the process as soon as possible and not to wire too little, so you don't have repeat the process several times. Some alternatives exist, such as wiring using a credit card company, which could be cheaper and faster, but I didn't try it.

Mobile phone plans are quite expensive in America (~\$50 per month). However, most places you'll be spending time in (your apartment, throughout campus) offer free wifi, so

a good alternative is to get a pre-loaded Global Sim card in Israel (Pelephone for example offers them), sign in to Google Voice and be assigned a virtual local phone number, which will work over your wifi/4G service without having to get a local Sim card.

As a student, you are entitled to 6 months free membership to Amazon prime, which allows you to order most items with a 2-day delivery commitment. Just sign up with your umich.edu email address.

Things to bring

Aside from the regular stuff you probably thought of, a set of bedsheets and a towel is probably a good idea to bring, if only for the first few nights. Another thing you should consider bringing is a power splitter cable, so you can use all your electronics with just one converter (instead of having to use a converter for each of them).

Clothing can get ridiculously cheap on sales, especially holiday ones, and it is a great opportunity to refresh your wardrobe; However, performance equipment such as heavy winter coats, jackets and boots can be very expensive and tend not to be on sale when you need it, so whatever winter gear you have you should probably bring along with you.

Flying in and out

When choosing your flight, keep in mind not only the cheapest total price but also your end game: Are you going to travel the country before your return, and if so, are you going to be carrying all your luggage around in domestic flights?

If you take a connection in Europe, you can fly directly into the Midwest (like Chicago, Toronto, possibly even Detroit) instead of the traditional New York, which might be able to save you some money on your connection flight. Also, try booking with an airline that offers a 2-bag allowance (eg. Turkish, Aeroflot, British etc.), because you're likely to return with more than you came with.

Michigan State ID

A state ID is a useful thing for anyone not interested in carrying their passport around or taking the risk of their Israeli IDs not being accepted as identification. However, keep in mind that it is revoked when your visa ends, so if you have thoughts of keeping it as a permanent American ID for your future travels, think again. If that is the case, it's probably not worth the hassle.

Summary

To conclude, a full time MBA in America is unlike anything you got to experience before. Those who are chosen for it make it their job to be MBA candidates for a full two years; aside from academic life, they get to practice interviewing, internships, club responsibilities, social life and most of all, networking. Taking on the exchange program gives you the opportunity to get a taste of all that, without having to suffer the expenses and put your life on hold for a prolonged period. The University of Michigan's perk of getting an alumnus status makes it a win-win. Add to all that the opportunity to live and travel the country like you never got a chance to before and probably never will again, and you got a real no brainer: there's absolutely no reason not to go on the program.