

## **University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU), Vienna, SS 2012**

The “University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences”, in German “Universität für Bodenkultur (BOKU)”, is represented in Vienna with two educational centres. The main buildings are located on the Türkenschanze. From there the second centre in the Muthgasse can be reached by bus within 30 minutes. A third centre is located in Tulln several kilometers outside Vienna. While courses are possible to take place at either of the mentioned locations, the administration is located on the Türkenschanze. There also is the Centre for International Relations (ZIB) which is responsible for supporting exchange students in finding their way around. Before arrival in Vienna the centre provides with relevant information. Also after arrival the staff is very helpful and can be asked for support or be approached with problems.

The search for accommodation is supported in so far, that adequate organizations which provide student housing are recommended. The main organization certainly is OeAD-Wohnraumverwaltungs GmbH (<http://www.housing.oead.at/>). They own/manage quite a number of student homes all over Vienna. These differ in quality, provided equipment and form of living (together) and thus in monthly rent. Application for a home should be done as soon as possible – then the chance is highest to receive the preferred place in the needed period. In the end I accepted a single room including shower and sink in the student home base19-Döbling. Kitchen and toilet were shared. Lavatory was provided in the cellar. The building itself really needed renovation and so did the rooms. The rent was acceptable at 269€ per month. The location was close to perfect: in walking distance to Türkenschanze, bus stop towards Muthgasse directly in front of the house, tramway stop towards both the city centre and the Wienerwald directly in front of the house, shopping facilities either directly in front of the house or in close walking distance. I was provided with this room from 1<sup>st</sup> March to 30<sup>th</sup> June. As some courses already started earlier than 1<sup>st</sup> March I additionally asked OeAD for accommodation from 15<sup>th</sup> February to 1<sup>st</sup> March. Luckily they had some vacancies and provided me with a room in a different student home at half-month’s rent. This one was located at the Prater and quite a bit of daily journey was necessary to reach BOKU.

Educational organization at BOKU is somewhat special. Every student is responsible for creating her/his individual study plan for the semester. Therefore the huge course offer of the university needs to be screened and suitable courses are then selected. These are often credited with much less than 4.5 ECTS. In consequence the weekly workload can result to be tremendous and it may easily turn out to be impossible to make 30 ECTS per semester. Besides it needs to be respected that individual courses of interest often have temporal overlaps or take place very irregularly. Also they may take place at different locations of BOKU. For exams there are often several dates offered or there need to be made individual appointments with the lecturer for oral examinations. In regard to study organization the self-service online platform “BOKUonline” is very relevant as students themselves need to register for both participation in courses and exams. Participation is often limited – also in the exams. However, in order to have access BOKUonline, personal enrolment at the university is first necessary! Altogether a lot of self-discipline and organizational skills are relevant to manage university life and keep stress level and organizational failure low. Educational atmosphere itself is relaxed and lecturers and students are seen as colleagues with different level of knowledge. The lecture situation is comparable to Hohenheim and

other German universities. Ex-cathedra teaching is still very common but students are involved via discussions. More active participation is expected in practical courses, exercises, seminars, etc. Many of the courses are in German language and only a limited number is taught in English. According to my learning agreement I participated in the following courses: Buchhaltung (3 ECTS), Bodenkunde (4.5 ECTS), Bodenbearbeitung und Bodenschutz (4.5 ECTS), Vermehrung und Schnitt im Obstbau (3 ECTS), Grundlagen und Methoden der Unkrautbekämpfung (3 ECTS), Verfahrenstechnik pflanzlicher Produktion (3 ECTS), Pflanzenzüchtung für Garten- und Obstbau (3 ECTS), Irrigation Engineering Principles (3 ECTS), Vorratsschutz (3 ECTS), Technologie pflanzlicher Lebensmittel (2 ECTS), Exkursionen zur Geschichte der Landwirtschaft und der ältesten Kulturpflanzen Europas (1 ECTS). However, exams I only attended in four courses altogether making 12 ECTS. Reasons for that were among others temporal overlapping of courses or intensive individual study as several of the mentioned courses required prerequisite knowledge not mentioned in the course description.

Life in Vienna is very much result of the history of this place. It is vibrant, diverse capital and melting pot of the different cultures of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire and neighboring countries. The cultural offer is incredible reaching from high-end museums and numerous traditional stages to mainstream and insider events. Gastronomy is highly diverse and cafés are famous. Shopping for daily needs is mainly done in supermarkets comparable to German ones (e.g. Billa, Hofer, ...) but more expensive shops can be found easily. Price level is comparable to Germany. Standard of living is diverse and differences between the districts of Vienna are present. Getting into contact with Austrians is no problem if you speak German. I can't provide information on the situation of being limited to English, but public Vienna as such is generally used to international visitors, international staff of the local UN office and tourists. For getting around in Vienna public transport is recommendable. It is very well established and there's hardly any place which can't be reached by city train, subway, tramway or bus. Students below certain age can purchase a semester ticket and then travel in the complete network of Wienerlinien (<http://www.wienerlinien.at/eportal/>). In principal going by bike is also possible but you really need to be used to city traffic and know your way around otherwise it may get dangerous.

In summary a semester at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences challenges organizational skills and self-discipline. Academic outcome very much depends on the lecturer and personal effort put into the topic. The city itself is very livable and provides plenty of possibilities to broaden horizon and enjoy life.