My Hendrix experience

After having spent one semester at Hendrix College, I do understand why Hendrix has the reputation of being a life-changing college. For me, being a Hendrix student was truly a once in a lifetime experience, which I can only recommend to everybody who wants to spend a semester abroad in the USA. Hendrix is set in Conway, a small but thriving town in Arkansas, the natural state. Since Hendrix is a private liberal arts college whilst located in the American South, you experience both the free and liberal spirit of the modern US on campus as well as the Southern traditional lifestyle and its welcoming culture in town. Ever since my arrival at Hendrix I’ve felt welcome and, in the end, I even wished I could extend my studies at Hendrix.

At Hendrix exchange and international students are not plunged in at the deep end but well taken care of by the international office staff and members of the international club, one of the many dedicated student organizations on campus. Employees and students work hand in hand to organize an orientation week for internationals every fall semester before fresher’s week. During the international orientation week, we were informed about campus policies, college life and academic integrity at Hendrix. Moreover, we were introduced to confidential persons at Hendrix, who are in charge of the students’ personal wellbeing and academic success. Above all, I made many new and close friends from all over the world during international orientation, with whom I was able to share my studying abroad experiences. Then, within the frame of fresher’s week, we had the pleasure to go on trips throughout Arkansas for a few days in order to get to know the region as well as our fellow American students.

International students were put together in one room with a first-year student in the majority of cases. To have a freshman as a roomie was fun because you could share the new college experiences with them, but also challenging from time to time because the freshmen were much younger than most of the internationals and thus at another stage of life. Personally, I had a good experience with my freshman roommate. Although she was four years younger than me and we didn’t have much in common, we got along pretty well and complemented each other. For me, it was new to share a room with
another person. However, I got used to it really fast and even became more considerate of my environment and the people around me through this experience.

The rooms in the dorms were either home to two or three same-sex students, adequately spacious, and included a lofted bed with a desk and chair underneath as well as a cupboard per person. Most of the Americans also brought along a fridge, microwave, and television for the common room. At first, the dorm rooms were rather empty and uninviting, but it didn’t take long until I made myself at home. Hendrix has several same-sex dorms and one mixed-sex dorm, in which female and male students live in one building but on separate floors. Freshmen and sophomores primarily inhabit the dorms, whereas juniors and seniors live in shared apartments. Both, dorms and apartments are social hubs with an open door policy. No matter what time it was, you were always running into people with whom you could have nice long talks, play games, make some music together, watch the latest episode of a famous American TV series, have a cooking event or just hang out for a while and relax.

Most dorms were built in the 19th century and are architectural beauties, which contribute to the scenic campus. Beside the picturesque dorms and academic buildings, Hendrix College has a gorgeous and homelike, Southern-styled campus with lots of green areas and cozy gazebos, where students gather and enjoy the warm and sunny weather in the American South. The centerpiece of the campus is called the brick pit. In the brick pit a lot of social events take place during the summer, like the traditional and unique shirrtails event. Shirrtails is a dancing competition, in which freshmen of each dorm compete against each other at the end of fresher’s week. I joined the shirrtails team and competed for my dorm. Even though the daily practice was pretty tough I was glad to be part of the major social event at Hendrix. Also, the team spirit and daily practices helped to become familiar with most people from my dorm and make new friends. In the end my team even won the girls’ competition. Traditionally, all shirrtails winners have to jump into the fountain on campus to celebrate their victory. The fountain is not only a beautiful landmark on campus but also part of a Hendrix birthday tradition, as people get thrown into the fountain on their birthdays. Also, you get a cake and a happy birthday song, sung by the Hendrix dining crew in the cafeteria. The Hendrix cafeteria is a culinary paradise for students and offers delicacies from all over the world as well as traditional and modern American food. Therefore, it is even renowned as the best college cafeteria in the American South. The Hendrix dining hall is integrated into the students service center, which also contains TV areas, a computer lab, a communal kitchen for cooking events, and an event hall, where club events like the international food bazar, concerts, movie screenings, and a weekly flea market take place. Off campus, but right across the street, you can find an athletics center and the quite new Hendrix village complex, which comprises more apartments for upperclassmen, a restaurant, where me and my friends gathered every Thursday night for karaoke, plus a bookstore, where you can stock up on books and college franchise for the semester.

Being a liberal arts college, Hendrix endorses free personal development and gives its students space to discover and develop their talents and strengths, and handle challenges on their own in order to be able to grow with them. However, Hendrix cares about every single student and offers support and guidance in academic and personal issues. You could always find someone who would have a sympathetic ear, no matter whether you turned to the dean of students, professors or your fellow students for advice.
Hendrix students are special – that is for sure. They are not only ambitious in academics and sports, but also absolutely social and tolerant. No matter what kind of personality or hobbies people have, at Hendrix everyone is tolerated and treated with respect. Due to this open-mindedness and the rather small amount of students, Hendrix is like a big family. The familiar and friendly atmosphere at Hendrix is also reflected in classes, which are kept small and personal so that every student can take the most out of a class, engage in discussions, and form a good relationship with the professors. Hendrix professors are highly competent and encourage critical thinking, personal engagement and self-reflection. Classes at Hendrix, as far as I’ve experienced it, are challenging but likewise motivating, because professors keep the lectures interesting, give diverse tasks during the semester and are eager to help students to improve themselves by giving constructive feedback on students’ presentations and papers.

My best examples for a challenging but rewarding class experience are the Model UN class and the concluding American Model United Nations conference I attended. Within the frame of the Model UN class I gained experience for my academic and personal life; for instance I learned how to take a stand for one’s concerns in public, as well as how to strategically pursue an objective while negotiating diplomatically.

All in all, I had the time of my life at Hendrix College. I learned a lot about the US in classes and in conversations with my professors and fellow students as we discussed politics, religion and cultural issues from both the European and American perspective. Moreover, I made a lot of new friends who are like brothers and sisters to me, explored different regions of the US together with my college friends, and appreciated the opportunity to live my life the American way for half a year.