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Degree Program at TAU: MBA

Host University: Wharton, Pennsylvania

Exchange term: Fall semester 2020 (September 1st – December 14th) - Online

Exchange during a world epidemic:

I received the cheerful announcement about my acceptance to Wharton's fall semester (2020) amid the "first wave" of covid-19. I knew what was happening around the world and understood the consequences right away. I was a bit discouraged about missing the opportunity to receive the "full package" of the exchange program, but after some thinking, I realized how grateful I am to be able to participate remotely – I decided to make the best out of it, and between September 1st and December 14 dedicated most of my time out of work to this adventure.

The atmosphere:

The main difference between business schools in Israel and in the US (Wharton in particular), is that students fully dedicate their time, as well as high tuition to studying. Being a geek myself, I enjoyed the gratifying feeling of preparing for class, spending weekends on reading material, and participating in discussions. The professors are very kind and welcoming and encourage students to approach during office hours. The syllabus is an essential tool to keep track of readings, assignments, and grades. The Learning Management System is Canvas, with a much friendlier user experience than Moodle and a very high adoption rate among professors, who learned how to master it to meet the present need. Things like 'Discussion threads' ("*Is the Montreal Protocol a good model for an international agreement on climate change?*") and dedicated 'Space' for work-teams and made it so much easier to get

around and interact despite the physical distance. The Zoom classes were spiced with polls (Poll Everywhere), break-out rooms, and organized discussions.

Networking

Though I didn't participate in any activity outside of class such as clubs or theme weeks (mostly because they were in the middle of the night for me), I know the students are highly devoted to these activities and feel contributed by them. There are dozens of clubs that are based on common interests, hobbies, country of origin, occupation, etc., where participants meet and debate, as well as organize events (for instance "Energy week" where key personnel from the Energy Industry attend panels and lectures). The school made a huge effort to maintain the vibrant and engaging atmosphere throughout the semester. Services like the career development center, remained active, and online social events were published frequently.

The courses:

My selection of courses was influenced by my desire to further explore and deepen my understanding of the relationship between business management and corporate (environmental) responsibility/ sustainability. I also needed to consider the time difference between Israel and Philadelphia (7 hours), and took only "morning" classes (between 9:00 am EST and 1:30 pm EST, which is 16:00-20:30 IST). There's a sufficient amount of courses, both full- and half- semester, to create a friendly agenda that doesn't require staying up late. I'd recommend taking full-semester courses. I took courses such as "Marketing for Social Impact" and "Businesses Social Responsibility" to learn about the experience gathered in these fields and to figure out if some of the lessons learned are relevant to the Israeli market. I was lucky to have a unique chance to meet the Chief Sustainability Officer of Microsoft who introduced carbon taxing to the company more than a decade ago or to study the different methods to market lifesaving medicines to the developing world. I especially enjoyed the course "Environmental Law and Management" taught by Professor Sarah Light. This course is shared with the Law Faculty at Upenn, so I received a comprehensive introduction to the US administration and the history and development of environmental legislation since its beginning in the 1900s. The course ended with an emphasis on the tools available today to govern corporates –

including private NGOs, insurance companies, and banks. This course was very thought-provoking and proved that even after 9 years of being an environmentalist there is still so much to learn and improve. Prof. Light was also very considerate and amusing - she changed the date of the first quiz due to Yom Kippur, introduced us to her pets, and played the banjo in the last class with a song she wrote about protecting our planet. In general, the selection of courses allowed me to be among people who share my values and it was great to be able to ponder together about shared interests and about making an impact.

Personal Note:

To summarize, during these 15 weeks of the exchange program, I engaged in a variety of activities, built a website for a restaurant reservation venture, pitched about potential interventions to prevent public littering, wrote an essay about the environmental injustice of increasing water tariff and worked on a final project in R program. I had plenty of discussions with team members from all around the world and learned about the similarities and differences in perspective, interests, and goals. I enjoyed the experience and didn't feel like staying in Israel darkened it too much. I think for anyone who's interested in a refreshing, mind opening experience, the online exchange program at Wharton is really perfect, the only thing to consider is that the duties throughout the semester are much heavier than in TAU, and unless you create connections in class, you'll have to complete everything without consulting to classmates. The good thing is that nothing is too hard or complicated, and if you reach out to a classmate, the professor or the TA, you'll most likely get all the help you need.

I am thankful to Hila and the University for the help and support throughout this period and for enabling this rewarding experience.