

Report on the Double Degree Program between the MSc in Economics and Development of Unifi and the Master in European Economic Studies of UBamberg

Student: Lorenzo Biondi (lorenzo.biondi2@edu.unifi.it)

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Organizational and Bureaucratic Aspects

I had the opportunity to participate in the Double Degree program with the University of Bamberg (Germany), spending the second year of my Master's degree at the partner university.

The program is well-structured, facilitated by the similarity between the study programs offered in Florence and Bamberg (an aspect I will explore further). The preliminary bureaucratic procedures required by both universities were handled clearly. Furthermore, the staff I interacted with were always available and helpful with any questions or needs.

Local Bureaucratic Procedures

For complete information on bureaucracy, I recommend checking out this article:

<https://www.uni-bamberg.de/en/studies/formalities-organisation/formalities/>

The most important thing to do is register with the Municipality (Anmeldung) upon arrival in Bamberg and deactivate your registration (Abmeldung) before leaving. Remember that both require an appointment and the waiting time is about two weeks, so it's crucial to act promptly.

It's not mandatory to open a German bank account, but it's a good idea to consider any fees your Italian bank may charge for transactions abroad.

Another important thing to know is that, once you register with the Municipality, you'll receive a letter asking you to subscribe to the radio (the German license fee). Unfortunately, you have to pay it, even if you don't watch TV, and it costs about 19 euros per month (basically a waste). Be sure to cancel your radio subscription before leaving, especially if you have activated automatic payment through your bank account.

Health insurance is not required for EU citizens (this isn't very clear on the University of Bamberg website). You simply need to have your card from the Italian Health Service.

I lived with my Italian SIM card (TIM) the whole year, but be careful about which plan you're using.

Erasmus Scholarship

The scholarship is the Erasmus scholarship (for 12 months of mobility) and varies based on your ISEE (Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator). To obtain it as quickly as possible, you must follow all the steps required by the office of international relations. If you have any questions (since, as happened to me, it's very easy to forget to send a document), the office always responds quickly and is very helpful.

Program Structure and Course Selection

The alleged "similarity" of the programs must be specified. At first glance, Bamberg's course offering is extensive: approximately 24 courses of 6 credits each, of which 6 must be chosen, in addition to the thesis.

However, the academic organization requires a strong concentration of exams in the first (winter) semester. Since the second semester is largely dedicated to writing the thesis, it is strongly recommended to take at least 4 or 5 exams between October and February, leaving a maximum of 1 or 2 for the summer semester. This requirement significantly limits the choice, as the courses available in the winter semester are approximately half the total.

Practical Tips on Choosing Courses

Check Activation It is essential to be aware that some exams in the *Module Handbook* may not be available for various reasons (lecturer "on leave," failure to reach the minimum number of students enrolled in the course, etc.). I strongly recommend contacting the professors directly before the start

of classes to confirm the activation of the course. I have found the professors to be very friendly and helpful.

Focus on Macroeconomics If your primary interest is macroeconomics, Bamberg offers an excellent variety of options. In my opinion (and that of other Double Degree students), this program is particularly recommended for those seeking courses in this field, in addition to the obvious experience abroad. There are at least three professors who offer courses in the Macroeconomics field, often with a very broad and stimulating approach:

- Prof. Christian Proano (International Finance and Macroeconomics, Macroeconometrics)
- Prof. Mishael Milakovic (International Economics)
- Prof. Frank Westerhoff (Economic Policy, Financial Markets)

Teaching, Calendar, and Seminars

Calendar and Facilities

Unlike in Italy, semesters in Bamberg start later:

- Winter: October 15 – February 7 (approximately)
- Summer: April 15 – July 20 (approximately)

The Economics department is well-equipped: it has an excellent cafeteria (which offers vegetarian/vegan dishes daily) and a functional library, stocked with all the textbooks used by the professors as well as a wide selection in the catalog. The library also offers printing services (at a cost of about 5-10 cents per page), as well as on-site computer and monitor stations.

Teaching Methodology

Currently, each professor (approximately 7 in the economics department) teaches four courses: two in the winter semester and two in the summer. Typically, the program includes two or three courses with exams (as in Italy) and one or two seminars.

In the seminars, the instructor gives some introductory lectures and then the student is asked to produce a "Seminar Paper," a scientific article on a specific topic. Personally, this experience was extremely useful in introducing me to research and to the scientific rigor required in the field of economics.

The atmosphere in class was truly pleasant. The instructors are very helpful and encourage active participation, which is a good thing. I found them all very attentive to our requests and open to clarifying any questions. The courses, all worth 6 credits, include a theoretical lecture and a tutorial, which is usually taught by a PhD student. This tutorial aspect was very interesting because it allowed us to interact with former students, who gave us useful and practical advice; I've remained in touch with some of them even afterward.

The German grading system ranges from 1, the best grade, to 4, which is a passing grade. Conversions to Italian grades are done using a table found on the website (or by asking the professor in charge). Changing your study plan is easy, and professors in Italy have been very helpful and quick to respond.

Registering for Exams

To register for exams, you must access the FlexNow platform (the electronic exam record, similar to SOL) during a period communicated by the University. Registration opens a month and a half before the exams begin, and the window remains open for about two weeks.

Master Thesis

To begin your thesis in Bamberg, you must have completed at least 60 ECTS credits in total (not just those earned in Germany).

The procedure for working with a professor (and in Germany, procedures must be followed to the letter!) varies slightly depending on the chair, but is always described on the University website. My advice is to look at the professors' research and courses (the link to each Chair is here: <https://www.uni-bamberg.de/en/economics/institute-of-economics/list-of-chairs/>) and immediately meet them in person to show interest and ask for practical advice. Once you've earned 60 credits, you can apply to begin. After choosing the topic, the instructor leaves a lot of room for the student's creativity, although—I and everyone else can confirm this—the professors have always been very helpful.

In Bamberg, the thesis is like an exam, and is averaged with the other grades. To register for the exam, you must follow a specific procedure through the FlexNow system. You can find all the information for the Faculty of Economics (SoWi) here: <https://www.uni-bamberg.de/en/examinations-office/final-thesis-registration-information/>.

You have four months to complete and submit your thesis from the day you register on FlexNow. Once finished, two paper copies must be given to the University. If, like me, you've already left Germany, you must mail them, as sensitive data cannot be sent by email in Germany. Grading takes up to two months (if you're in a hurry, just contact your professor in time) and, if you've already completed all your exams, about six weeks are needed to receive your degree certificate. Please note: if your thesis is submitted after September 30th, you'll have to pay the €118 registration fee for the winter semester again.

Accommodation and Living in Bamberg University

Accommodation

The University offers affordable student housing (around €350-450 per month). The city is small, so getting around is never a problem. I and the other students were assigned a room in the dormitory on Pestalozzistrasse, very close to the University, though a little further from the city center.

I ended up in a single room and was very happy with it. The building was dated, but equipped with everything you need. Rooms can be single or shared (with two or three people). Getting around the city by public transportation is very convenient. Buses run their last at around 1:00 a.m. I preferred to get around by bike, as the city has bike paths everywhere. The price of a used bike is around €40-80.

The City and Social Life

Bamberg is a small but charming city (80,000 inhabitants), with a strong student population (about 12% of residents are enrolled at the university). The presence of many international students means that almost everyone speaks English, making daily life easier even without knowing German. For example, I didn't go beyond an A1 level in German and never had any problems communicating with anyone. However, I recommend trying to learn the language. The university offers courses throughout the year, and making friends with locals can help a lot and make learning the language fun.

Cost of Living and Mobility

The cost of living in Bamberg is comparable, or slightly lower, than that of Florence.

- **University Fees and Transportation:** The University of Bamberg fee (about €118) includes a local transportation pass.
- **Deutschland-Ticket:** As a student, you'll receive a discount (about €20 instead of €50) on the Deutschland-Ticket, valid on all local, regional, and suburban public transportation throughout Germany. It's extremely convenient for traveling during breaks.
- **Break Period:** Between the end of first-semester exams and the start of second-semester classes, you'll have about 1-1.5 months free to spend as you please.

Food Costs

- **Cafeteria:** A lunch (first or second course + side dish + coffee) costs between €5 and €8. Prices vary (e.g., first course between €2.60 and €3; second course between €4.40 and €5), and the vegetarian option is usually the cheapest.
- **Supermarket:** Prices are in line with Italy. You'll find cheaper chains (Lidl, Netto) and more expensive ones (Rewe, Edeka).

Nightlife and Beer

- **Pub/Drinks:** A half-liter pint at the pub costs about €4.40, while a cocktail is around €7-8. Dinner out costs €15-20. A typical dish like pork knuckle with sauerkraut and bread, plus a pint of beer, costs around €20 (definitely worth trying!).
- **Pfand (Deposit):** Germany uses the Pfand (deposit) system on glass and plastic bottles. By returning empty containers to the supermarket, you'll get back €0.08 or €0.25 per bottle. For example, a case of 20 bottles of beer (which costs around €21) comes to around €17-18 after deducting the Pfand. Top.
- **Student Nights:** The city center is lively, especially on Fridays and Saturdays. A little less so during the week and in winter. I recommend Monday's student night at the Live Club: drinks are half price (0.5l beer for only €2.50!) and it's the best opportunity to socialize.

Integration and Opportunities

German Course (Highly Recommended)

The University offers a preparatory German course before classes begin. We left about a month early to take it, and it was worth it. Almost all international students participate, which offers a unique

opportunity to meet lots of people and form a group right away. Most of the friendships I've made were formed in those three weeks. I recommend the course not so much for the German itself, but for the immediate socialization it provides.

Events and Sports

- **University Sports:** The University offers various sports courses with a registration fee that seemed low to me.
- **Parties and Events:** Given the large number of international students living in the dormitories, activities and parties are frequent. News travels quickly! The University itself organizes events, particularly two wonderful parties on campus (one in October and one in June), perfect for making new friends.

Getting to Bamberg (from Florence)

To get to Bamberg, our most popular options were:

- FlixBus: about €40, 14-hour journey (without transfers). Convenient because you travel at night.
- Train: about 10-11 hours (two changes), cost varies from €60 to €120 depending on the time of year (prices based on someone under 27, for whom trains are half the price in Germany).
- Plane: you can arrive in Munich or Nuremberg (Frankfurt is too far, not convenient). Personally, I don't recommend it, given the cost (there are no low-cost lines) and the time savings, which aren't particularly significant.

Useful Links

- Feki Canteen Menu and Hours (Economics Faculty): <https://www.swerk-wue.de/bamberg/essen-trinken/mensen-speiseplaene/mensa-feldkirchenstrasse-bamberg>
- Website with useful information for life in Bamberg (run by students): <https://feki.de/>
- <https://www.uni-bamberg.de/en/studies/>

Overall Opinion (personal)

Honestly, I left with low expectations. We had no evidence of previous experience, and the thought of going to Germany for a year hadn't fully convinced me. I left mainly because of the lack of macroeconomics (my passion) in Florence, and because my professors recommended it.

Looking back today, I'm glad I left and didn't give up. Sure, a year seems like a long time before leaving, but once you're back, it seems like a moment. The University of Bamberg's organization helped a lot with the social aspect (perhaps the most important of all). The preparatory German course was perfect. I arrived in Bamberg on September 10th, and by the 14th I had already met a lot of people. Living in the dormitory was a fun experience. It had been nicknamed the "holiday village" because of the atmosphere. My days always filled up without me realizing it. The city is small, but in my opinion, it's perfect for a student spending a year abroad. It gives you the opportunity to experience it to the fullest. I've met people from all over the world and made friends that I think I'll carry with me for life. Living in a different country also gives you the opportunity to understand many things. One, perhaps the most important, is to appreciate many things that you take for granted at home.

From an academic perspective, I found it quite good. The university services are good, even if sometimes a little dated. The university, if you're used to the Novoli campus, is much deserted. Students in Germany seem to prefer studying at home rather than in the library. They eat very early, so the cafeteria is often deserted at 1:00 PM. I found the professors to be very knowledgeable, and the classroom atmosphere was always pleasant. Perhaps also due to the smaller size compared to Florence, the atmosphere was more "familiar," less distracted, and distant. I found the exams relatively easy, but also because I took almost all interesting subjects and topics that interested me (or that I had already partially covered on my own). The professors were very good at sparking interest during the classes.

In short, I had a great time and would do it again. I highly recommend it.