

## **Experience report: exchange semester at Stellenbosch University**

July – December 2025

### **Arrival and Accommodation**

I spent a semester at Stellenbosch University from 13 July to 25 November 2025. I flew from Hamburg with a transit in Dubai and was picked up at Cape Town International Airport by the International Office of Stellenbosch University, which arranged direct transport to my student residence.

From the beginning of the application process, the exchange semester coordinator at Stellenbosch University provided continuous support by sharing links and detailed information on how to apply for university student housing. This assistance was extremely helpful, as I was unfamiliar with private accommodation options in Stellenbosch. Moreover, based on advice from previous exchange students and general safety considerations, I preferred to stay in university-provided housing.

The housing application process was straightforward, and acceptance was uncomplicated. Two other students from the Department of Economics and Business and I were all assigned rooms in Concordia Residence. The accommodation options were flexible: I shared a flat with one roommate, another student lived with three flatmates, and one student had a single room. This flexibility allowed students to choose living arrangements according to their personal preferences.

Although university housing is relatively more expensive than private accommodation, I would strongly recommend staying in a student residence. Concordia, in particular, provided an excellent opportunity to meet both local and international students, also from other African countries. This greatly facilitated social integration during the first weeks. Additionally, Stellenbosch University attracts many exchange students from all over the world, and living in student housing made it much easier to build friendships across cultures. Another major advantage was the high level of security provided within the residence compound, which contributed significantly to a sense of safety and comfort.

### **Preparation**

The bureaucratic preparation process can sometimes be complicated, as documents may need to be obtained from different institutions depending on factors such as your place of residence or bank account. However, in our case, the visa process went more smoothly than expected. For all three of us, the visas were issued earlier than the embassy initially indicated.

It is highly advisable to apply for the police clearance certificate and medical certificate as early as possible, as these documents can take time to process. A visit to a general practitioner was sufficient to obtain the medical certificate, while the police clearance certificate could be requested at the city hall and was mailed directly to the home address.

Obtaining an international driving license will be very useful, particularly for traveling to destinations where Uber rides would have been expensive or impractical. Since South African health insurance is mandatory for the visa application, Momentum Health was a budget-friendly and suitable option for students.

All required information for the visa application is clearly provided on the embassy website. However, it is important to regularly check the website for unexpected closures. Although the embassy officially operates on Tuesdays and Thursdays, there were instances when it was closed despite regular opening days being listed. Therefore, it is recommended to check the website up to the day before traveling to Berlin or Munich for the visa appointment.

### **Course Selection and Academic Structure**

After the orientation week, students are given one additional week to attend lectures, assess their selected courses, and finalize the learning agreement. Once submitted, changes are no longer permitted. Consulting local students and speaking directly with professors was extremely helpful in understanding course expectations and workload.

The grading and credit system differs from the European system: 1 ECTS corresponds to 2 South African credits. According to the funding agreement, students are required to complete at least 25 ECTS, while Stellenbosch University recommends not exceeding 60 South African credits. Course options are available across the Department of Economics, Agricultural Economics, and selected undergraduate courses specifically designed for exchange students.

All courses included continuous assessment in addition to final exams or papers. Students should be prepared for presentations, quizzes, mid-semester tests, report writing, and STATA or R assignments using quasi-experimental methods.

### **Course Overview**

#### **Economics of Education I (5 ECTS)**

Despite being a 5 ECTS course, this module was academically demanding and required consistent effort throughout the semester. It involved weekly readings and submission of reading reflections, primarily focused on South Africa but also addressing broader development contexts.

The course was taught by multiple professors, which offered valuable opportunities for academic interaction and potential future research collaboration. Weekly quizzes tested econometrics and STATA skills, requiring strong engagement during tutorial sessions. Additionally, a final research paper had to be submitted. Overall, the workload should not be underestimated based solely on the ECTS allocation.

### **Health Economics (5 ECTS)**

This course consisted of lectures and practical sessions covering methods such as Instrumental Variables (IV), Difference-in-Differences (DiD), and Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD), along with approaches to measuring health inequality.

Assessment included an assignment where students could choose between writing an essay or conducting an empirical analysis using quasi-experimental methods. Topics covered ranged from informality and health inequality to teenage mental health and equity in health services. A class debate on child mental health further enriched the learning experience.

### **Agricultural Policy Analysis (8 ECTS)**

Offered by the Department of Agricultural Economics, this course included two mid-semester tests, one assignment, and a final exam. The mid-semester tests covered most of the course content and significantly reduced the pressure of the final exam.

The assignment involved constructing a Policy Analysis Matrix (PAM) by selecting a crop from a South African region and analyzing policy distortions using indicators such as private and social profitability. Course topics included the nature of the farm problem, distortions in agricultural incentives, and the role of agriculture in South Africa's economic development.

### **Environmental Policy (8 ECTS)**

Also offered by the Agricultural Economics department, this course consisted of three mid-semester tests and a final exam. It focused on the relationship between ecosystem stocks and service flows, renewable and exhaustible resources, and sustainability analysis.

The course integrated environmental and economic systems to assess long-term sustainability and applied theoretical knowledge to real-world environmental management challenges in both urban and rural contexts.

### **Volunteering and Community Engagement**

One of the highlights of the exchange semester was participation in the Community Engagement Programme run by Stellenbosch University. Students could choose from several social projects based on their schedules.

I participated in the Songo Project, which took place in a township and involved supporting children with English and mathematics homework. The project also provided professional cycling training, including proper bicycles and safety equipment. Volunteers occasionally joined the training sessions, creating opportunities for mutual learning.

This experience allowed me to step outside my academic routine and gain insight into the social challenges faced by underprivileged communities. It encouraged reflection on personal privilege and provided a meaningful opportunity to contribute time and skills while building genuine connections with the children.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, my exchange semester at Stellenbosch University was an extremely enriching experience. Living and studying far outside my comfort zone helped me grow personally and academically. The courses I selected allowed me to further specialize in topics I am passionate about, while interactions with fellow students both local and international were deeply rewarding.

Stellenbosch itself is a beautiful place, and a semester break in September provided opportunities to explore the surrounding regions. Finishing exams by mid- to late November also left ample time to travel within South Africa and to nearby countries.

This exchange semester not only enhanced my academic profile but also broadened my worldview, and I would highly recommend Stellenbosch University as an exchange semester destination.