

## **A Semester Abroad: Learning, Discovery, and Unexpected Connections in Tulsa, Oklahoma**

My decision to embark on a semester abroad at the University of Tulsa (TU) in Oklahoma wasn't solely driven by academics. Sure, the prospect of delving into Energy Management, Energy Business, and MBA courses was exciting, but there was a deeper yearning – a desire for cultural immersion and personal growth. Little did I know, Tulsa would become a transformative experience, weaving together academic rigor, a mix of Southern and Midwestern hospitality, and a rich historical tapestry that continues to resonate.

Preparing for life in the United States involved more than just packing my bags. I diligently completed online English modules, ensuring smooth communication. However, the true learning began upon arrival. Stepping onto TU's picturesque campus, situated right on the legendary Route 66, was like stepping into a postcard. The Collegiate Gothic architecture exuded a timeless charm, and the manicured lawns provided a serene backdrop for the bustling student life.

The warmth of the Oklahoman welcome was immediate. My classmates, a diverse mix of nationalities and backgrounds, quickly embraced me. We formed a close-knit group, exploring Tulsa together. We spent weekends picnicking by the Arkansas River, cheering on the Golden Hurricane – TU's spirited athletic teams – and attending the vibrant Philbrook Museum of Art exhibits. The university itself hosted a plethora of events, from guest lectures by industry leaders in the energy sector to lively cultural festivals showcasing the rich tapestry of Oklahoma's heritage.

One such event left an indelible mark. A renowned historian delivered a poignant talk on the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921. The brutal event, where a thriving Black neighborhood, Greenwood (also known as the Black Wallstreet), was systematically destroyed by a white mob, was a stark reminder of the racial injustices that have plagued American history and are still present today. Learning about the resilience of the Greenwood community, their efforts to rebuild, and the ongoing fight for justice sparked important conversations among students, fostering a deeper understanding of the nation's complex past. I strongly recommend visiting the Greenwood Cultural Center, a poignant reminder of the Black community's prosperity before the massacre.

Beyond the classroom and campus life, Tulsa offered a fascinating historical journey. We ventured to the Tulsa Historical Society & Museum, immersing ourselves in the story of Native American tribes who have called Oklahoma home for millennia. The Creek Nation, the Osage Nation, and the Cherokee Nation, among others, all have deep roots in the land. Their rich cultural heritage, from intricate beadwork to captivating storytelling traditions, continues to enrich the state's identity.

The discovery of oil in the late 19th century irrevocably transformed Oklahoma. However it is not all about drilling in Oklahoma. In 2023 half of its electricity generation came from wind energy which is surprising even to Oklahoma citizens themselves. Further exploration led us to the Osage Nation Museum, where we learned about the Osage people's struggle to protect their oil wealth during the 1920s. The stories of oil barons and the subsequent economic boom of the 1960s and 70s painted a vivid picture of Oklahoma's dynamic history – a history filled with both triumph and tragedy.

My semester at TU wasn't just about acquiring knowledge from textbooks. It was about forging friendships, confronting historical truths, and appreciating the resilience of the human spirit. The contrasting stories of the Greenwood community – its devastation and its unwavering spirit – serve as a constant reminder of the importance of social justice and community building. As I delve deeper into the world of energy management, I carry with me the lessons learned from Oklahoma's unique history – a history where resource wealth intertwined with societal issues. Tulsa is desperately trying to attract young business owners with tax credits and housing opportunities and it seems that creative minds follow the call. Transformation is ongoing in the former oil and gas capital.

The kindness of the Oklahoman people, the beauty of the TU campus, and the depth of historical exploration made my semester abroad an unforgettable journey. It was an experience that transcended academics, enriching my understanding of the world and myself in ways I hadn't anticipated. Leaving Tulsa was bittersweet, but the connections I made and the lessons I learned continue to inspire me, shaping my future endeavors both personally and professionally.