



Academic Year in Freiburg

Studienprogramm an der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität

University of Iowa • University of Michigan • University of Wisconsin • Michigan State University

SENDING PACKAGES TO GERMANY ~ CUSTOMS ISSUES

Please share this information with parents, friends, and relations!

PACKAGES. You may wish to have all packages from the U.S. sent to you c/o the AYF Program Center address. The advantage is that such packages can be delivered during regular office hours, Monday through Friday. If the German postal service attempts to deliver a package to you at your dorm room and you are not home, you will receive a notice directing you to pick up your package at the post office, which may be less conveniently located than the AYF Program Center. The dormitory staff do not accept packages for students.

If you opt to receive your packages at the AYF Program Center, please use the following mailing address and **always** include your name (this may seem obvious, but occasionally parcels have arrived at AYF without a student's name):

Robbie Doe
Academic Year in Freiburg
Albert-Ludwigs-Universität
D-79085 Freiburg
Germany

However, for all courier service deliveries, such as packages or letters sent via UPS, FedEx, and DHL, the address needs to include the street address. Occasionally, online merchants also request the use of an address that includes the street. Feel free to use one of the following versions of the address; it is for the same location but in a format that works for couriers.

Robbie Doe
Academic Year in Freiburg
Albert-Ludwigs-Universität
Platz der Universität 3
D-79098 Freiburg ← ... note the different ZIP code!
Germany

Robbie Doe
Albert-Ludwigs-Uni / Academic Year
Platz der Universität 3
D-79098 Freiburg ← ... note the different ZIP code!
Germany

CUSTOMS ISSUES. Please read the following information about customs regulations and charges carefully. We encourage you to share it with your parents and friends. Paying close attention to this information can save you some major hassles and a significant amount of money.

Parcels mailed from the U.S. to Germany require a **customs declaration** form, and what gets written on this form often has powerful consequences for the terms and conditions of delivery in Germany. The customs declaration form asks for the content, the dollar value of the package, and whether the content is a gift or merchandise. In general, if the content of a package is worth more than EUR 45, the package will be subject to German import taxes of 13.5% - even if the package has been declared a gift. (Please note: Items are only merchandise if you purchase them from someone. If your parents buy you a nice new sweater and send it to you, it is no longer considered merchandise by customs; it should be declared a gift.)

For several years, the administration and enforcement of German customs regulations for parcels sent via regular U.S. mail has been sub-contracted to German Logistics Systems (GLS). Since GLS took over part of this task, enforcement has become a lot more stringent than in the past, and the cost to consumers has risen. Customs charges themselves are still determined by customs officers. But GLS now advances customs payment to the government, processes delivery of the package, and then - days or even weeks later - invoices the recipient to recover the money that has been advanced. For this service, GLS charges an additional administrative fee of EUR 17 per package. Even a very modest customs charge of, e.g., EUR 5 therefore turns into an invoice of EUR 22. Some - avoidable - customs invoices received by AYF students in past years were as high as EUR 55 or, in one recent case, almost EUR 75 (for a 300 \$ digital camera).

There are no absolutely surefire ways to prevent having to pay customs; in some cases, you simply will have to pay the customs invoice. But the good news is that (a) your parents and friends can minimize the chance of having your package be subject to customs, and (b) if you have received a customs invoice that seem inappropriate you can apply for a waiver to have the charges reversed.

To minimize customs charges, it would be most helpful to keep the following in mind when preparing a shipment from the U.S. to Germany:

- * Parcels declared as "Gifts" may have a maximum value of EUR 45 per package. Therefore, if the total value of a parcel is higher than EUR 45, it is often better to send two packages. The cost for postage may be higher, but if one can prevent customs invoices, this should pay for itself. To determine the dollar equivalent of EUR 45, check a currency converter (e.g. www.xe.com/ucc) or ask at the local bank.
- * Parcels declared as "Merchandise" are usually subject to customs, even if their value is under EUR 45. This tends to be true especially for DVDs and other entertainment electronics. (Packages with content of minor value have sometimes not been assessed; e.g. a CD bought used from an online auction for \$ 4.)
- * Two additional categories of shipment are free from customs for full-time study abroad students provided the goods are exclusively for the personal use of the student (i.e. not intended for resale). Exempt goods are defined as "items of daily use" (household items, bedding, clothing, etc.) or "back-to-school" items (calculators, typewriter, books, etc.). In either case, your parents should note the category on the customs form and then list the specific items.
- * Even in light of the "back-to-school" exemption, however, we urge you to be careful about laptop computers. AYF strongly recommends that you carry computers with you on the plane rather than submit them to the vagaries of shipping and potential customs charges.
- * It is also helpful to note on the customs form if an item is used rather than new (i.e. "used clothing", "used books").
- * For shipments made shortly after your move to Germany, your parents may additionally write on the customs declaration form - and in large letters on the outside of the box - the word "Umzugsgut" (i.e. things that are part of your move). This is particularly useful for cutting down on customs problems with the many boxes of winter clothes that tend to arrive in Freiburg starting in late October, early November.

Once you have received a customs invoice from GLS, all is not lost if certain conditions are met. A process is in place through which one can appeal a customs assessment. (More information will be provided in the Program Handbook that you receive in Freiburg and during orientation.) But in order to appeal you will need a letter from the sender that contains a packing list and confirms that the goods fall into one of the exempt categories. Of course such a letter could be supplied after the fact, but our recommendation would be to ask your parents to include it with the shipment itself as a routine matter. The sample letter provided at the end of this memorandum can be readily adapted for specific shipments. (It is perfectly fine to provide such a letter to customs in English.)

One word about insurance for packages sent by regular mail: Whether you are mailing from the U.S. or from Germany, you would be well advised to insure a package if it contains a very valuable item (a camera, for example), especially if you name it on the customs declaration. The labels are read by many eyes along the way... For packages that do not contain anything particularly valuable, it is best to avoid using insurance or, if desired, to take out relatively low insurance. Customs officers, too, will use the "insured amount" listed on the customs declaration form as one benchmark for making a customs assessment; a package insured for 100 dollars will very likely generate a customs charge unless the content clearly qualifies as *Umzugsgut*, items of daily use, or supplies for study, as discussed above.

Packages sent with express mail service or by courier, such as FedEx, UPS or DHL, are in a separate category regarding customs. These carriers have to clear customs before delivering packages to the recipient. Consequently, these mailings arrive in Freiburg with some delay (can be up to two weeks) and the carrier has often already advanced the customs charges. You will be required to re-pay any customs charges immediately upon delivery plus the carrier's fees. FedEx, for example, charges EUR 13 for each package where customs had been advanced.

This is not cheap by any means, but UPS has been known to charge an astonishing EUR 32 in fees alone in addition to customs charges. We recommend, therefore, not using UPS for any shipment that might generate a customs charge (especially electronics). You should also know that German customs regulations stipulate that the cost of transportation (the mail or shipping cost) is part of the base cost used to calculate customs or import duty. A more expensive express shipment will therefore generate a higher customs charge than a package with the same content sent by regular U.S. mail. Sometimes it is possible to avoid customs by providing additional documentation to a courier service. For all such courier and delivery services it holds true that there is no possibility of negotiating a customs waiver after the fact for which, in principle, you are eligible.

It is AYF policy to accept such packages and to advance the payment on your behalf. However, you remain personally liable for the payment of all charges and will be required to reimburse AYF in full.

When ordering goods through the Internet, you should be aware that if you have things sent directly from a company outside the European Union, these goods are "merchandise" and therefore subject to customs. And even though the product information on the web tells you that your desired book or CD is available within two days, it does not usually reach Freiburg as quickly. Delays are the rule rather than the exception.

<p>Sample Letter -----</p> <p>Sender' full name and address</p> <p>Addressee's full name and address</p> <p>Date</p> <p>Re: Customs assessment for this package</p> <p>Dear Madam or Sir!</p> <p>This is to certify that I am sending the following items to my son/daughter/friend <addressee's name>: <include short packing list></p> <p>These items are * gifts for the exclusive personal use of my son/daughter/friend <name> and the total value of gifts is \$ <dollar; best not to list more than 40 per mailing>; and/or * items needed for his/her daily use ("Ausstattung", clothing etc.) or for studying ("Schulmaterial", books etc.)</p> <p>When determining the customs due for this mailing, please be advised that my son/daughter/friend is currently an enrolled student at the University of Freiburg and, to the best of my knowledge, should be able to receive items needed for his/her daily use and for studying without having to pay customs charges.</p> <p>Sincerely yours,</p> <p><signature of sender></p>	<p>A "filled in" Sample Letter -----</p> <p>Jane Doe Main Street 11 Big Town, CA 95404 USA</p> <p>Robbie Doe c/o Academic Year in Freiburg Albert-Ludwigs-Universität D-79085 Freiburg Germany</p> <p>November 20, 2015</p> <p>Re: Customs assessment for this package</p> <p>Dear Madam or Sir!</p> <p>This is to certify that I am sending the following items to my son Robbie: * cookies (gift) * CD (gift) * winter coat -- used * hiking boots -- used * dictionary</p> <p>These items are * gifts for the exclusive personal use of my son Robbie, and the total value of gifts is \$ 16; and * items needed for his daily use ("Ausstattung", clothing etc.) and for studying ("Schulmaterial", books etc.)</p> <p>When determining the customs due for this mailing, please be advised that my son is currently an enrolled student at the University of Freiburg and, to the best of my knowledge, should be able to receive items needed for his daily use and for studying without having to pay customs charges.</p> <p>Sincerely yours,</p> <p>Jane Doe</p>
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