**By Max Lattermann, German Expat and Student**

“Alabama? Seriously?! Where even is that place? And what would you want to do there?”, “Dude just stay here with us, and finish school. I bet their education sucks anyways!” All of these are examples of the way my friends in Germany reacted when I told them that I would move to Birmingham, Alabama. One of them took that as a challenge and started searching the internet for stupid memes making fun of the American south in order to keep me from going. I was on the edge of finishing high school in Heidelberg, Germany and was more or less opposed to my dad’s decision to start working in the States for the next couple of years. I felt like I was giving up my entire life by leaving behind everything that I knew. I would not be able to see my friends anymore, nor would I continue high school in the usual setting. Everything would change right before my final exam that I needed to get my High School Diploma, the Abitur. That had been pretty much all I was worried about in terms of future planning at that point: finishing school to the best of my abilities and worrying about all the rest, like universities, internships, and jobs, later. Moving to a new country across the ocean did not fit into that plan at all.

In August 2017, when the time to move had come, I still was not too excited about that change in plan. On one hand, I learned to see the advantages and to understand this undertaking as a big chance, on the other hand, however, I felt terrible. I did not want to give up the life I lived under any circumstance, and on top of everything, out of all the places in the world to go, the one where would end up at was Alabama. But I tried to see things positively, since to be honest I did not know a single thing about this state, so there could be a lot of positive surprises. And positive they were. All the teachers and students at my high school (Vestavia Hills High School) welcomed me warmly and were super interested about life in Europe. My new high school, against expectations, was technologically far superior to any school I had ever seen in Germany and with the AP program, I was offered classes of a fairly similar level to what I was used to. The different subjects gave me the opportunity to explore and understand my interests, since students in every grade were able to pick for example a math class that fit their interests, needs, and abilities, as opposed to the one math class everybody in my grade in Germany took. I was able to take in-depth classes in fields that I would have never been able to in a regular German high school, such as Economics, Photography, and Computer Science. The wide variety of sports, club activities, and other extra curriculars gave me the opportunity to easily meet new people. At first, however, I was very overwhelmed with all those new things. My high school in Germany had a total of around 500 students from class 5 to 12, and now I was in one class with 500 people. My lunch period was two hours earlier than what I was used to and not being able to leave school to just grab a snack in the city but to be stuck with the cafeteria food also took some time to get used to. College applications were absolutely confusing to me, all my peers spent some time of their junior year and summer with touring colleges, contemplation about where to go, and applying. I, on the other hand, still followed my attitude that I would wait and see and first worry about finishing high school. Eventually, far into the second semester of my senior year, I was able to sort out applications and got accepted into Samford University. I quickly realized that seeing things positively helped me to acclimate and enjoy my time in Alabama. What at first seemed to mess up my expectations and ideas about my future turned out to be a great chance for me to explore my interests and gather a lot of experience. Therefore, I decided to stay and get a bachelor’s degree in an American college. So far, Samford has been a great experience and it helped me to see life from another perspective. I started to become involved on campus through Student Government Association, an organization for students to shape college life in a way that would never be possible in a German university. The easy contact to professors makes life as a college student more hassle free than I would have expected and shows that the professors actually really care about us students.

Of course I have my problems with the life here, such as the nonexistent public transport system, the lack of walkability of Birmingham, and the resulting dependence on cars, but overall I have learned so much and met so many new amazing people, learned about completely different perspectives and attitudes, and, of course, improved my English a lot, so that these obstacles seem pretty small in comparison to what I have gained and still gain.