



University of Warsaw

2011-2012

preparation
exchange/placement application process
The exchange placement process was quite a lot of paperwork. Not only I needed to fill in a lot, it also took a lot of time to meet all the requirements, because many documents had to be filled in by other persons. Gladly those persons were very helpfull and provided the documents fully and on time. Although it was a lot to arrange I have to say that the documents that needed to be filled in were obtained easily (mostly emailed) and clear.
counselling/support at home university
In general I can conclude that the support at the home university was quite good, meaning that they did follow the application process for the studying abroad part and the language course, they did try to contact the other parties when something went wrong or there was not feedback after a considerable amount of time , there always was someone every week to contact and they always wanted to listen what you had to say.
academic preparation
The only academic preparation I did, was looking up the courses I wanted to follow at the University of Warsaw. Although that was the only academic preparation I did, I chose my courses carefully. I wanted not only to enlarge my knowledge in specific fields of economics but I also wanted to enlarge it by choosing courses to create a larger basic knowledge. At the University of Utrecht I am specifying into international and macroeconomics. So I decided to take courses like advanced microeconomics and environmental and resource economics to enlarge my basic knowledge and I took courses as international labor migration to enlarge my knowledge of international economics.
language preparation
Language preparation was not really needed, because the courses I had chosen were all given in English. Gladly the bachelor degree is enough proof of your ability to speak, write and read English, so it was not needed to do a TOEFL-test. Although all my courses were in English I decided to follow a language course Polish two weeks before the start of my semester. I was not only interested in studying in abroad, I also wanted to learn more about Poland and the way to do that is in my opinion to start with learning the language.
Finances
For the application it was needed to create a financial plan. I did that by making a revenue-expenses table, which



provided a clear overview. I found out that my revenues (on monthly basis) were bigger than my expenses so I did not had to worry about how to cover my expenses. This was mainly because the domestic currency of Poland, the zloty, is less in value than the euro. Exchange rate: 1 euro = 3,85 zloty. This was an additional benefit for me and helped me enjoy Warsaw more, because I did not had to worry about financial issues.

study/placement abroad period

study programme/work plan (concerning content and organisational issues)

Before my departure I already chose which courses I wanted to participate in. Still I needed to change a lot on my learning agreement, because the ECTS points assigned to the courses were in the previous study year different from the points assigned this year. Like I mentioned before, I chose my courses carefully. I wanted not only to enlarge my knowledge in specific fields of economics but I also wanted to enlarge it by choosing courses to create a larger basic knowledge. I already was in Warsaw for two weeks (due to the language course) before the first semester started (namely on the first of October) so I was used to meeting five days a week in the morning at nine o'clock for three hours. Next to that I was used to get homework and to have an interactive class. When my semester began the structure I got used to was not the case anymore. It turned out that the university only provided lectures for courses. Next to that there was no material (like books, articles or other written knowledge) that needed to be purchased, to be used, to be studied, to discuss, etcetera. They just provided you with a list of so-called 'supplementary' readings. Thus I can say it is really hard to determine what you have to study in order to obtain enough knowledge to be able to pass the exam. Other points that drew my attention was the fact that there were no (not a lot) formal rules teachers had to obey to and that teachers were not fully informed. In the first week of the first semester there almost every teacher asked me a question about an organisational issue of which in my opinion they should have been informed about. Questions were about if some room was the correct classroom, when the class started, which class had to be taught, etcetera. In my opinion these are important organisational issues and thus should be arranged better. My statement about that there are almost no formal rules teachers have to obey to, comes from the experience with exam dates and contact hours. Teachers were able to demand papers before you could participate in the exam, change exam dates and time (often they asked the class when the exam should be), not show up when there should be a class and dismiss the class early or start to late. For me this not clear formulation of rules led to a lot of problems which could have been foreseen.

academic quality of education/placement activities

In my opinion you cannot say that the academic quality of one university is lower or higher compared to another university, because I think the differences in educational systems cause bias in this comparison. The education given is just different, which demands that you should adapt to that change. The question is thus not if the quality is lower or higher, but if you are quickly adapting to the change. For me it was difficult to adjust to the change. Normally (here you already have it, what is normal? I will define it now as the way I was used to in Utrecht), I get my knowledge from reading the required chapters of the book which you were obliged to buy, then prepare questions to enhance the understanding of the course and lastly to discuss it during a tutorial. In Poland I did not know how to obtain the knowledge and understanding of the material of the course. In Utrecht I almost never go to the lectures, because I do not feel like they complement the material treated in the book and/or tutorials, but in Poland they were the only contact hours I had so I needed to go. I tried to visit the lectures every week but after a few weeks trying I decided not to go anymore, because every time when I went they discussed only two to five slides and did not say something that enhanced my knowledge. I should stress that not every course was like that, but the majority was. Eventually I learnt the courses by copying the books, which were announced as supplementary readings. A side note concerning the library: There is one main library, but they do not offer books



related to economic sciences. Every faculty also has there own library, thus for my books I went to library of the faculty. The problem with the library was that you were only allowed to borrow one book at the time and you could only borrow it for two weeks. Next to that there are not enough books available to satisfy the demand for it. Next to the fact that I did not knew what and how to study, there also was an obstacle concerning the level of english of the teachers. Although most of them had a big vocabulairy, their pronunciation was lacking sometimes, which made it sometimes difficult to understand where they were talking about. The last thing I want to say about the academic quality is concerning the exams. In my opinion the exams were in most cases not a way to test your knowledge about and understanding of the material. Although I read a lot of books and I learned the lecture slides, most of the times the questions were about tiny specifics and not about the general idea and understanding.

counselling/support at host institution/organisation

To get around the University of Warsaw arranged an information meeting at the beginning of the semester. In that meeting we got some useful things like a map of the city and one of the campus, information about the main library procedure, the erasmus warsaw committee and general information about contact persons. This all was very handy, but unfortunately most of the things too late because I already was there for two weeks. Further the support was good; teachers were in most cases easy to reach, they were willing to listen, the international relations office was helpful and the department coordinator was also easy to reach.

transfer of credits

The grading system at the University of Warsaw also uses the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), thus the transfer of credits was very easily due to the same grading. One point of notion is that unlike in the Netherlands, where almost all courses are valued at 7.5 ECTS, the ECTS points that is possible to obtain per course depends on the workload and level of the course under consideration.

student life

welcome/orientation programme

Because I also participated in an intensive language course provided by the University of Warsaw two weeks before the official start from the semester I was present at two welcomes; the one I had before the start of the language course and the official welcome. Both welcomes contained the same information, but only at the second welcome I got a University of Warsaw bag with usefull information about the city itself, like a map of the city, places for sightseeing, information about accomodation, restaurants, and more. I preferred to get the bag at the first welcome which would have been handy. Further the University of Warsaw organised a orientation week which covered not only how to get around in and what to arrange at the university, but also events to get in touch with other Erasmus students.

Accommodation

When I just arrived the accommodation seemed ok, but after time past it did not seem that ok anymore. Before I went to Poland I did not expect to end up in a very luxurious room, I expected just a very simple room , located not more than thirty minutes away from the university, with all the needed furniture (bed, closet, desk, light), proper working Internet, washing facilities and proper working heating. Nothing fancy, just the main necessities for a student to make it possible to study. Besides expectations about the room I also had expectations about the whole way of living. I expected a building where only Erasmus students stayed, where there was a common room with kitchen and a common bathroom. Eventually it turned out that the accomodation was located about 45 minutes away from the main campus of the university (my faculty was even further away), there was no proper working



Internet.
leisure/culture
Concerning to leisure, for me it was important to do some sports in the time being there. This was more difficult to find then that I expected. The University offered a lot of sport activities, but the problem was that all of them are given in Polish. Eventually I just enrolled and went there to check it out if it was possible to follow although it was taught in Polish. It turned out that it was, because the teacher was willing to translate everything in English for me. Next to sportactivities offered by the University you can also join private organisations, but still the problem with language remains. Next to sport there are multiple other leisure activities , like visiting public parcs, museums, the zoo, going out etcetera. Not only is Warsaw worthwhile to exploit, but also other Polish cities are worthwhile to see like Gdansk and Krakow.
suggestions/tips
Make sure you visit a shop of E. Wedel to enjoy some very good chocolate!
conclusions
would you recommend this host organisation/destination to others? please explain
Although I enjoyed my stay in Warsaw, I do not want to go back again for six months or longer. Still I recommend Warsaw to other people if they like to experience to study abroad in a country that is still nearby the Netherlands, but with a totally different culture and language and when they do not want to be worried about financial issues.
do you have any additional advice or comments?
Because there are many things you need to arrange before, during and after your stay, make sure you have an overview of all the deadlines and required documents.