

2014-2015

Report 1

faculty/college	Humanities
level	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> bachelor's <input type="checkbox"/> master's <input type="checkbox"/> PhD
name study programme	French language and culture

PREPARATION	
exchange application process	
	To apply for the exchange was not very difficult. After I made the decision to which university I wanted to go, I made sure to prepare/fill in all the documents necessary, and to upload them on Osiris before the deadline. It was also necessary to send some documents to the university in Tours.
counselling & support at Utrecht University	
	The counseling and support came from the International Office from the UU, and they helped me very well. When I ran into a problem or had questions, I sent an e-mail to my coordinator and I got a helpful answer, most of the time right away.
academic preparation	
	I didn't do any extra academic preparation. After 3 years of classes on bachelor's level (mainly in French), I didn't really know I could even prepare more for it (I went to Tours in the '4 th year of my bachelor). It was enough to follow the classes I chose, but it could be a challenge sometimes because I decided to take some classes outside the subjects of my studies (linguistics, literature, etc.), like art history.
language preparation	
	Before my exchange, I had already had three years of French at the UU because of my studies French language and culture, where the majority of the classes are taught in French. This was sufficient for me not to run into problems when I had to arrange things at the university or in general conversations, but in the beginning it was still difficult because I was not used to speak French on a daily basis. Don't count too much on speaking English, not many people speak it (well)! (except for the other exchange students, a lot of them speak English with each other).
finances	
	<p>In preparation for my exchange I had to make a calculation of how much the exchange was going to cost me. I took into account for instance the rent of a room in Tours, the price for food every month, public transport, insurances, and a certain amount of money for trips. Before you leave it remains an estimation, so you should always have some extra money for costs you couldn't have known before of course (in Tours itself there weren't really big surprises).</p> <p>To give a bit of a general indication: For a room in Tours you should think about at least 250 euros a month (if you want a rather normal one). The supermarkets are a bit more expensive than in the Netherlands, but it also depends on how much you want to spend on it. A transport card for the busses and trams was 27,60 a month. Something else to take into account are the trips you want to make and if you plan to eat dinner in a restaurant often (the average price for a meal without drinks is about 10,-) It is also practical to get a French phone number (for me it was 20,- per month).</p> <p>It is good to know that you can also get the CAF from the French government (money you get to help you pay your rent), it is about 90,- per month.</p>

STUDY ABROAD PERIOD	
study programme (content and organisational issues)	At the university of Tours, you had the whole month of September to follow the classes that seemed interesting to you. If you were certain that you wanted to follow a class, you had to fill in the title of the class on a form and get the teacher to sign it. The signing was never a problem, but it was a bit of a challenge to get a programme with enough ECTS and classes that seemed rather interesting and not impossible to follow. I chose to do classes from different directions, so I had classes from art history, an international relations programme and translation classes english-french/french -english. I also followed a class at the CUEFEE, a part of the university that teaches French to exchange students. I didn't do all the classes from the study plan I had to make before leaving, because some classes were given at the same time (you can't know this before you get there) or were a bit disappointing because it was different than expected.
academic quality of education activities	The quality of the education was all right in my opinion, but somewhat different. Some of the classes were 'cours magistraux', where the teachers tell their story and you have to write everything down. Sometimes these classes appeared to be a bit less structured. You had to learn what they told and make a written exam or answer questions during an oral exam. The translation classes I followed allowed a bit more participation, the translations were treated together with the students.
counselling & support at receiving university abroad	The counselling and support from the receiving institution was somewhat chaotic. The university has an international relations office ('bureau des relations internationales') where you had to fill in some documents at the start of your exchange. There I was assigned a coordinator, but I only saw this coordinator once, and then I got another one (who wasn't the person who helped me the most in the end). To get more information about the classes you wanted to follow, you had to go to another coordinator who could just print the timetables of those classes so you could to make a programme. The whole organization for exchange students doesn't really work as effective as it could be, but in the end every turns out fine. If you want to know something you have to mail someone directly, or even better, go see them. It wasn't that the people weren't willing to help, they were very friendly and if you told your problem they tried to do something about it right away most of the time, but it just was a bit chaotic.
transfer of credits	I don't have experience with the transfer of credits yet.

STUDENT LIFE	
welcome & orientation programme	The first week of September, the university had organized an introduction week, which was for all students, so not for exchange students specifically. There was a general introduction of the university where you could go to, a bike ride through the city in teams and a welcoming speech at the town hall. In general, these activities were organized quite well. A few weeks later there were also some meetings about the university and another welcome at the town hall for the exchange students, but it wasn't that helpful anymore because by then you had already figured out how most things worked.
accommodation	I decided to sign up for a room in a 'résidence universitaire' from the CROUS. To do this, I had to fill in a form and send it with some other papers to the university of Tours before going to France (the paperwork can

take some time). You could give 4 choices, and I got my first one. But when I got the confirmation that I was admitted, I was first placed in another residence because my first choice opened in October (which I didn't know), but I arrived at the end of August. This first résidence universitaire didn't really have a good reputation, but the second résidence was very good, I really enjoyed it there. Living in a résidence universitaire was quite good in the end, I could live there again if I were going to Tours for a second time (but this is my personal experience, it's different for everyone of course). There are several résidences, but some of them are not in a safe neighborhood. Another possibility is to go look for a 'collocation', so a house with other students. This can be (but doesn't necessarily has to be) more expensive.

If you decide you want to live in a résidence universitaire, it is practical to know that you probably don't need to open a French bank account (I was told I had to so I could receive the CAF, but in the end the résidence receives the money and then calculates it with your rent), but check it first with the résidence. And when you apply for a room, they will also ask to send you an insurance for the room with the other documents, but it's possible get this once you arrive in Tours.

leisure & culture

There are quite some things to do in and around Tours. It has a medieval part in the city centre which is really nice to visit. The central place in that part is Place Plumereau, where you can drink or eat something, the atmosphere around there is great. The city has a fairly good public transport system with trams and busses, but if you go home a bit late in the evening there aren't any busses/trams anymore (the last ones go around 23:30 - 00.00, but there are taxis of course). Around Tours there is a lot to see as well. Tours has it's own train station, so you can go to a lot of places by train. The area is known for its châteaux, they are really worth a visit. And the city is situated a bit in the centre of France, so from there you can go to other cities quite easily (I went to Bordeaux for instance). Paris is also close by. If you plan to make a lot of trips to other cities, there is a pass you can buy that gives reductions on train tickets.

The international office and the ESN in Tours also organize trips to for instance châteaux for the exchange students, and other activities as well.

suggestions/tips

-If it's possible, it is practical to be there a bit before the university starts. Then you have time to arrange everything without having to stress.

-look for other classes that you could find interesting if the classes you planned to do cannot be combined or are different than you expected.

-try to participate to several events at the beginning just to meet people.

CONCLUSIONS

would you recommend this university/destination abroad to others? please explain

I would definitely recommend the destination to others. It is a nice city, not too big, not too small with enough things to do and to go to with friends. For me it was perfect, but it is not compable to Paris for instance of course, so if you like very big cities with an endless possibility of activities, Tours may be too small for you. The people in the city were in my opinion quite friendly as well, and their French is good to understand because they don't really have an accent (they say that in Tours they speak the most 'standard' French). The university itself was all right, but for me the amount of interesting classes was a bit limited (but this depends entirely on what you are interested in).

do you have any additional advice or comments?

Report 2

faculty/college	Humanities
level	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> bachelor's <input type="checkbox"/> master's <input type="checkbox"/> PhD
name study programme	French Language and Culture

PREPARATION	
exchange application process	<p>The application process for my exchange at the University of Tours started with a few problems: it was four years ago that the last student of Utrecht University studied in Tours and in the meantime, the contract with Tours hadn't changed so it was only possible to apply for a master Musicology (music sciences). That wasn't really my study area of course so first of all we needed to know if it was possible to apply for bachelor studies (in particular courses of Humanities). The response of the University of Tours didn't come quickly and wasn't really clear, it seemed that they were overloaded with emails and that they couldn't handle the amount of incoming students. But after a reminder it appeared to be possible for me and my class mate to go studying in Tours, and we could start with our dossier. That was a new problem, because we had to prepare many documents that sometimes weren't comprehensible and clear at all, even for us who studied French. Until the summer, we could have mail contact with the coordinator of the International Office, and he reacted quite fast. But during July and August, no contact was possible, so if you had any questions, you couldn't reach the University. Then there was another dossier for our residence where we would stay during our exchange, and unless the positive fact that you don't have to search for a room yourself when you choose for a student residence, I think it is quite disappointing that you get your 4th choice and that you're not placed in the same residence as your friend, while you clearly mentioned that you would like that. Also, we could have received more information about how it works with the CAF, a housing benefit. We thought we had to open a banc account to be able to receive it but afterwards, we didn't get it but the residence itself so our French banc account was useless. These are a few problems I encountered, but for the rest I am satisfied about the application process, especially about the responsiveness and great help of our own coordinator in Utrecht!</p>
counselling & support at Utrecht University	<p>I just mentioned it in my last sentence above, I am really satisfied about the support of my coordinator of our International Office, Julie Leijtens. She knew almost everything, and if not, she tried to help us the best as possible, even while we were abroad, I could always address myself to her for advice. The only negative experience I had, and that was a real negative and stressing one!, was the mistakes the Erasmus team/international office made in the process of according my grant. They didn't approve my dossier so I had to do everything over again but in fact they hadn't looked well and in the end what I had done was all correct. So that was both wasted time and a lot of stress. Luckily, I got my grant in time, but I had to email a few times more during and after my stay in order to show University that my data or the form I asked them to fill in weren't correct. Of course, making mistakes is OK but in case of the grant I got the idea that they were a little bit neglecting.</p>
academic preparation	<p>I didn't have to prepare much on academics, because it wasn't known until far after my arrival what courses I really was going to follow. And in fact, everything I studied in Tours was just extra, I already finished my whole study program in Utrecht except for my bachelor thesis.</p>
language preparation	<p>I didn't really have a language preparation because my French already was quite advanced. Of course I didn't</p>

speaking it fluently but I had studied it for 3 years (and before that, 6 years on high school), so it wasn't that necessary for me to prepare for the language. Maybe I could have learnt some more vocabulary but honestly speaking, I think I can say now you learn that the best is in the country itself.

finances

I saved enough money to be able to pay my own rent etcetera in France, because I worked during the whole summer and we got quite an amount of money from our government and of course the Erasmus grant. But I must say I'm a little bit more poor now back home..

STUDY ABROAD PERIOD

study programme (content and organisational issues)

I followed a very diverse program of courses, from European Law to Art History, and the levels were also quite different, some courses were easy to follow, other very hard, but mostly they were really interesting. The organisation of the university itself, of the courses, and the organisation for the Erasmus students at university were a little bit chaotic (and that's an understatement). I think the system at the François-Rabelais University is really old-fashioned, they do not work with modern digital materials yet, you need to do LOADS of paperwork for every single step to undertake during your stay- work that seems often inefficient and unnecessary. The buildings were old and smelly, the students pay that little for one year that they don't have the money to pay the teachers a normal salary, to offer study books and materials for the students or even to pay for trash cans for example. It was mostly the chaotic bureaucratic stuff that worked against a good start for me at the university, because they lost my application dossier and I didn't receive a student card but after more than a month. I think that's the difference between The (Very Organized and Efficient) Netherlands and France and that you need to accept and get used to this cultural difference, and I think I did after the first frustrations I did get used to it and could enjoy life at the University of Tours. That was also thanks to the help of some great teachers and the friends I made of course.

academic quality of education activities

I think the academic quality itself of the university was higher than most other French universities. I heard stories of a friend who had studied in Rennes and she didn't have to do anything, while I was very busy with homework and exams a lot of the time. Also, the classes were mostly small and presence was obligatory, so you needed to be there. The exams were difficult in general, and the notes not so high. The university organises quite a lot of education activities, which was nice. There were some receptions at the city hall to welcome the international students, information sessions (not that exciting) and the International Relations Office was very active on organizing activities for Erasmus students. They organized nice trips to castles and other sites, often for a low price.

counselling & support at receiving university abroad

I think the people I met at university who were responsible for the counselling of international/Erasmus students were very friendly and helpful. But I think they were too overloaded with work, because of the great amount of incoming students, and that the university probably hadn't anticipated to that. So therefore, the impression I got at the International Relations Office was that it wasn't well organized and that they couldn't support us always that good as necessary.

transfer of credits

Before we left, it wasn't clear how we would get to know our notes, so before the Christmas holidays I sent an email to our coordinator for information, and he would email us a transcript of records whenever the notes were presented. But in February, we still hadn't got any news, so I had to contact him again. Luckily he answered me directly and gave me the notes right away, he just wanted to send me them so he said. But until now, I don't know yet if I really get the credits for my courses, because Utrecht University need to approve the

courses.

STUDENT LIFE

welcome & orientation programme

The first week of September we had an introduction week at university, which was very nice, with as highlights a hilarious bike tour through the city, soirees at the Guingette, a beer garden down the river the Loire and a first visit with new German friends to a castle. The information meetings the university had organized were OK, but not that good because at the first session they only talked about how to access the university web site, not that interesting.. I think they could have informed us better about the courses, there were no information folders available so we didn't know anything about the offer and what to choose.

accommodation

At first, I wasn't that satisfied about my student residence because it was not in the city center, and you always needed to get the bus (that stopped riding at noun), and to go to university you had to change. Also, it began a little unpleasant because my rent that I had to pay at my arrival appeared to be debited not once, not twice, but three times and we couldn't get it back.. lots of miscommunication between the secretariat, me, my parents and the bank, but afterwards it was all solved and I had become a well-known visitor of the secretariat. Nevertheless, what question I had, they were always very helpful and I think it's great to live in a residence with a lot of things already taken care of, like the furniture and the hygienic check may be frightening, it's a good reminder to keep your room clean. I also really liked my hallway, were I had nice neighbours, a lot of French girls who were very nice. My friend could move to my residence after a month, that was great too. And the distance wasn't that bad after all, because we lived in a safe neighbourhood. I think I may do it again like this and opt for a student accomodation, but a room or apartment with (a) friend(s) in the center for not to much money would be even better of course.

leisure & culture

I've spent so much time doing nice things and enjoying the cultural environment that it's too much to mention all of it. But I think the French culture is so typical that that's maybe the thing you remember the most. It's really an extraordinary experience to finally live in the country you learned the language and culture of and to be able to practice what you've learnt and to discover things you didn't learn.

suggestions/tips

At the moment you know you want to study abroad, start directly with your preparation and really, research everything very well! It's all in a good preparation they say, and it's true. This is something that you mostly need to organize yourself, even if the university does a part of it and helps you, it's important to be pulling the strings and keep pulling them. So if someone doesn't answer, don't wait (too long), but repeat your request, go to someone else etc. And, when you leave for the first semester, remember that you've the summer holidays before. Of course, all the organizational stuff is not always your favorite business to do, for me it wasn't, but it's all for a good cause. When you've arrived and everything is settled and no mistakes are made, you'll be thankful. I would say, go to France for a change, because it's really a beautiful and interesting country, its culture is special and its people are also very nice.

CONCLUSIONS

would you recommend this university/destination abroad to others? please explain

I really liked the city of Tours and its area, the beautiful Loire Valley. You've so many things to visit there, if you love castles it's absolutely the place to be. And if you love biking or canoying (I would recommend the canoying

France – Université de Tours

tour on the Cher towards the castle Chenonceau, magnificent). Tours is a lovely old city, not too big, not too small, a lot of students, I would certainly recommend studying there. Also the University is to be recommended, unless my criticism I still think it's a good, qualitative university for French terms, and that you can follow a very broadened program over there. I can only speak for the Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social History right now, but it may also be applicable for the other faculties. The nice thing about my faculty is that it's located right in the heart of Tours near the river.

do you have any additional advice or comments?

I think I already said a lot of things above in the field 'suggestions/tips'. When you do your 'homework', everything will be alright. Just go to Tours, France! :)