

2013-2014

Report 1

preparation
exchange/placement application process
The exchange application process was quite easy and clear. I was reminded of the deadline(s) by email and this worked very well. It was not too much work to fill in the forms and it was easy to get them signed.
counselling/support at home university
My home University of Utrecht supported in several ways. They were very easy to reach if I had any questions and at the office hours forms could be signed very fast and easily. There has also been an information evening where all different steps that have to be taken were shown.
academic preparation
I could not prepare that much for the courses abroad before I got there. I did make sure that I finished everything at my home university.
language preparation
To be accepted at the host university I needed to have a ??? which I received from the international office at my home university. I did not have to take any tests to prove my English skills. I was confident about my English skills as well because I already traveled abroad for six months before. I did visit the country of my stay abroad (Finland) before so I was already familiar with the native language as well.
finances
The most important financial task that had to be done was to sublet my room in the Netherlands. Besides organising that I worked all summer to earn some extra money for my stay abroad. I also had to change my public transport card to a monthly travel payment. It was clear to me what had to be done in order to organise all the financial tasks, you just have to make them happen (in time).
study/placement abroad period
study programme/work plan (concerning content and organisational issues)
My study programme had to change a bit when I got to the host university. Because some of the courses in the study programme were self study courses without lectures I changed them to lectured courses. I prefer lectured courses especially because I was studying abroad and in English. The changes were easy to make and I was able to contact my home university quite easily. I was very happy with the courses I took, the content was very interesting and I could look at my field of study from a different perspective. The course Religion, Media and Culture was my favorite.
academic quality of education/placement activities
The courses I took at the host university were not much harder or easier than the courses at my home university. The difference was that I had to take more courses than I am used to. Normally I have 4 courses in one semester, now I took 7 to make sure I got the same amount of ECTS in a semester. This was a bit hard sometimes. The academic quality of education was quite good. Students are very free to choose subjects of their own interest and that can be motivating.
counselling/support at host institution/organisation

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The host institution gave enough support. They were easy to reach by email or in person and they made time to discuss your study programme (if needed). They were very helpful if you had any questions and also very kind in their service.

transfer of credits

In the beginning of the exchange we got a 'blue card' where we could fill in all the courses that were taken and all other information that is needed for the transfer of the credits. At the end of the exchange we had to hand in this blue card at the international office of the host university so that they can send me the transcript of my results.

student life

welcome/orientation programme

In the first week the host university organized an orientation programme of three days starting on Wednesday. It was useful to see where all the buildings of the university were located and how you could find your way. It was also nice to meet all the other exchange students and get to know them. There could have been more focus on meeting people. The seminars were in a huge room with all the exchange students so there was not much room for socializing. We did a bus tour on the last day which was not so exciting but the intention was good.

accommodation

Accommodation was organized well. During the summer I got an email where I was told to contact the host university if I still didn't find accommodation. When I contacted the host university they helped me to find a room. It was good that they could help me because they have more sources to search with. After that everything was arranged quite fast and I found a perfect place to stay for my time abroad.

leisure/culture

The city where my host university was located (Turku, Finland) has a lot to offer. Unless it is not that big, it is not too small either. Of course there were a lot of events organized by the ESN Network (Erasmus) but they are there for exchange students and I also wanted to meet local people. That is why I personally did not attend to much of the ESN events but it was good that it was there in my opinion. A lot of students benefit from it but my interests were just different. I volunteered at a small cafeteria, I attended to many film screenings and went to some nice bars/dancings with live music. There was also an art museum that was very interesting and the cathedral that is in the centre of the city has very nice architecture.

suggestions/tips

I really enjoyed taking a Finnish language course, I would recommend showing some interest in the culture of the country you are visiting.

conclusions

would you recommend this host organisation/destination to others? please explain

I would definitely recommend this host university to others. It is a relatively small university and that makes it quite personal. You can have contact with teachers and staff easily and they are very friendly as well. They offer a lot of courses in English and everything is organized quite well. They offer very good student lunches (but this is very well organized everywhere in Finland) and they have a student union that also organizes a lot.

do you have any additional advice or comments?

It would be useful to note that Åbo Akademi is the Swedish speaking university in Turku. (this means that the courses are given in Swedish (and English) not in Finnish) I did not

know this before hand and it would have given me a better prospect on how it would be.
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2009-2010**Report 1****Academic Preparation**

There has been no preparation for the courses I am participating in in Finland, because I had no idea what these courses would look like. As a matter of fact, I still don't have after this first week of school in Åbo. What is new to me are the selfstudy courses in which I am supposed to read hundreds of pages to prepare for writing essays. I am taking 3 of those, and 2 more are turned into discussiongroups, so the few that take part in these courses can debate about the issues raised in folklore-related matters. The only indication I have is that courses grant 5 ECTS credits here, while there are, generally, 7,5 ECTS for courses in Utrecht. This might mean something about the difficulty of the courses, but then again, in this stage I cannot quite judge that.

Language preparation

Since Swedish is the official language at Åbo Akademi, I took part in a Swedish language course taught at the James Boswell Institute in Utrecht. It only turned out to be overlapping another essential course, so I could not take part in the entire course, unfortunately. I nevertheless picked up some Swedish. Though, when I arrived in Åbo, Finnish was actually the general language. The city is bilingual, but so is the country, more or less. So while I am here, I will take part in courses in Finnish. I have picked up some basic Finnish already, but the grammatics are still mumbojumbo to me. Apart from that, English is quite common and one can trust to be served in English in all stores and on the streets. Finns like it though when Finnish is tried. The regular kiitos and terve are answered with smiles, though the Finns are supposed to be not that hartily or expressive.

finances

I had designed an elaborate plan to save money during the 6 months before the exchange would take place. Unfortunately, due to several unforeseen matters, I was not able to actually save up the money needed... I so decided to rely upon the loans I could get from the IB-Groep. Only a month before the exchange took place it turned out I was no longer entitled to financial support by the government. Which was a tough break. I still had some taxrefunds to look forward to, but it was not clear when that would take place. But since I would not be working during the exchangeperiod (something that got awkwardly clear in a little speech by a carreercounsellor who prepared non-Finnish speaking students for the very slim chances to find work in Åbo), I needed some financial support from somewhere. So I visited someone close whom I knew acquired over a serious amount of money, and we agreed on lending me €750,- per month. With that I should be able to pay the rent, several schoolrelated matters and shop for groceries. I have to pay these €3000,- back as soon as I can.

Study/placement abroad period

Once I was in Åbo, things went fairly smoothly, thanks to the extensive guidance by the tutor. I wish to thank the Åbo institution for taking care of this. I took care of a bankaccount here, a Finnish phonenumber, the mandatory payments to the schoolservices and a couple other things. The planning of the courses and study

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itself was guided by several introductory speeches by schoolmanagement. Within a week all that had been taken care of. The actual participating in courses has not taken place yet, but I will get back to that once I have experienced it.

Academic quality of education/placement activities

Åbo Akademi grants 5 ECTS per course (on beginner's level), so to get even with the Dutch score, I had to enroll in 3 courses per period. This could have been a problem, but I was prepared since I took 3 courses per period in the previous 3 periods at Utrecht also. Added to that, the courses weren't very intensely scheduled. In fact, I enrolled in 9 courses in total, of which 2 never took place. I passed all courses relatively easily, perhaps because most examinations were through the writing of papers, and no standard exams were taken. The toughest course was a course in postmodern theology, which involved a lot of reading. Several other courses were selfstudy. I managed fine and got excellent results. Still, I suspect exchange students are being treated less strict because of the specific situation exchangers are in, and the cultural background in exchange-classes differ greatly from student to student. Altogether, I estimate education in Åbo intermediate. One shouldn't have too much difficulty to pass exams, though maybe the grading system helps a large number of students to pass who wouldn't pass in the Dutch system

Counseling support at host institution/organisation

As I wrote in the first section at the top, counselling at home was excellent, though one has to ask the right questions and find his own way to where one wants to go and what is offered there. In that aspect one can't actually be guided, since it has to do with personal preferences. For this you have to be selfmotivated, which I think I was. Once you know where the holes in the road are and what to keep an eye out for, you can ask the right questions and find your way through the jungle of applications and institutions. Erasmus has a pretty good tutorial for these things, but actually finding a place to go is of course a private matter. As I said, there were answers to all questions and support has been excellent.

Transfer of credits

I gained 32 credits for 5 courses, of which 4 were 5 ECTS, 1 was 10 ECTS and 1 was 2 ECTS. According to the International Office these are directly transferred to the total of ECTS in my academic progress.

Student Life**Welcome/orientation programme**

Orientation in Åbo is quite extensive. The tutors are excellent (at least mine was) and there are several activities to get in touch with fellow students and get to know the city. Since we're all here and more or less on our own, it is nice to hang out with fellow travellers/students. I am not really interested in just hanging at bars and drinking (beer's expensive in Finland!), the interaction with other people is actually quite nice

Accommodation

Because I only paid rent for the studentaccommodation from the first of september, I had to find accommodation elsewhere for the week previous to that. Introduction takes place from the 26th of August, until quite deep into the academic year, with several parties and happenings. The first two nights I slept in a hotel, which was clean but very tiny and had not very much privacy. My room was small, though nearly 50 euro's per night. After these two nights I spent 3 nights in a hostel that was quite nice and easygoing. I had a good time there and

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I met some people I had interesting conversations with. I was able to pick up my studentroom key on the 31st of August and I moved in immediately. The room is fine, though it has bad acoustics, due to the bare walls. I have thus been cruising around town and I think I now know my way around. It's good to travel alone.

Leisure/Culture

Åbo is pretty much a studentcity. There's lot of places to have coffe and beer that are quite comfortable. Actually more comfortable than a lot of Dutch places. People here have a different pace and different morales. It appears that there is less violence here in the nightlife, There's not too much police on the streets, probably because it is not needed. Though Åbo is not particularly beautiful, it has a conveniently organized streetplan. It's not a city worth taking lots of pictures in, apart from the occasional classicistic building and sculpture. The river Aura that runs through the city is quite dirty and the weather is, yet, quite nice though somewhat windy. There's not too much rain, fortunately. I have visited the museum, which is not too big, but it has a nice representation of modern as well as older local or national art.

Suggestion/tips

Take part in the small excursions and introductory happenings, it gets you up to speed with people and the city. Walk around, get to know the town, and absorb the city's atmosphere and its people. Don't go any place for coffee, in stead try Three Beans Café or GreenZ (to be updated). Visit all different supermarkets, especially Stockmann, and have your eyes poked out by all the types of marmelade. Look good for peanutbutter! It is not that popular here. Visit the Island of Vepsä, only costs 12 euro's return ticket. Go to Stockholm on the ferry (probably the nightferry), and/or to Tallinn, where I haven't been yet. Also, try and take a look in Lapland. Of course, don't forget Helsinki. Saint-Petersburg is a bit tougher, since you need a visa and that can be a pain. But there's excellent public transportation by train and students get 50% off!

Conclusions

Make sure you prepare your trip! Arrange it all in time, because however desolate you think your destination is, there's always lots of other students. And they all need a place to stay. Also, find your way through the papers and institutions on time. Ask for vital info such as deadlines. I, for instance, did not know when I should arrive, and thus I booked a flight one day late, because I arrived on the day that introduction already had started. Ask for this! Though documentation is plentiful, there might be some vital info you overlook or is omitted. Arrange for the essential and let yourself be informed about what that is. Finland is still Europe, so lots of things are easy for us, Dutch, but they still need proof of identity and don't forget to bring EVERY single piece of paper that has some relevant info on it concerning your stay in Finland. You will not dispose over a printer when you need one.

Additional comments/Recommendation

Åbo is not a particularly beautiful place to live or settle, but from here you can go anywhere. The weather is fine (at least during the summermonths) and the people are okay. The language is totally incomprehensible, which might make one feel as if illiterate, but that adds up to the feeling of being away. So far, I have not had any trouble with that. As I mentioned earlier: English is generally understood.