

**2022-2023**

**Report 1**

faculty/college	Humanities
level	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> bachelor's <input type="checkbox"/> master's <input type="checkbox"/> PhD
name study programme	Taal- en Cultuurstudies (Language and Culture studies)

destination city & country	Alcalá de Henares, Spain
how did you travel to your destination?	By airplane to Madrid, then by train to Alcalá
name university abroad	Universidad de Alcalá
start date	05 / 09 / 2022 (dd/mm/yyyy)
end date	21 / 01 / 2023 (dd/mm/yyyy)

<b>PREPARATION</b>	
exchange application process	<p>I already knew that I wanted to go to Spain, so all my top 3 choices were there. My first choice was in Madrid, so when I got put in my second choice, the University of Alcalá (UAH), I didn't really know what to expect. However, I was not too upset about it because it is very close to Madrid and most importantly it is in Spain. Sending the Learning Agreement was a little difficult, because the UAH used an online version and the UU did not. But in the end everything was okay. Choosing my courses and collecting all the necessary documents took quite some time and it was a bit stressful, but it was not difficult, just time-consuming.</p>
counselling & support at Utrecht University	<p>The International Office always responded to my emails very quickly, which was very nice, because applying to a foreign university can be quite stressful because you don't know how everything works. The International Office was very helpful with this, but of course most of the work you have to do yourself, although the IO does help remind you of deadlines. Researching universities and applying for them is quite a bit of work, but it is so worth it, which is also exactly what the IO tells you.</p>
academic preparation	<p>I did not really do any academic preparation before going to Alcalá because I knew that my courses were going to be in the same field as my studies at the UU.</p>
language preparation	<p>I had already taken some Spanish courses during my first year and I took an extra one to get to level B2, which is the recommended level to take courses in Spanish in Alcalá. My English was already the recommended level, and I definitely noticed that Dutch people's English is considerably better than Spanish people's, so I had nothing to worry about.</p>
finances	<p>Life in Alcalá is considerably cheaper than in Utrecht. I paid €330 in rent (excl. water/energy) for a room at 5 minutes walking from the university and the city centre. There were definitely people with more expensive rooms, so it is very important to be early in booking it and to be critical. Furthermore, groceries, food, clothes, etc. are a little cheaper than in the Netherlands, especially in local shops. The Erasmus grant money is very nice to have, but you will probably need to use savings or other loans as well, especially if you want to do fun trips</p>

and activities, which I highly recommend. ESN (Erasmus Student Networks) offers some trips, but you can arrange it yourself for quite cheap as well.

## STUDY ABROAD PERIOD

study programme (content and organisational issues)

When you get to Alcalá, you have to have a meeting with the International Relations coordinator to officially choose your courses. You have to find the courses you want to do yourself, and, very importantly, you must find a way to fit them all into your timetable. This is a puzzle that you have to do yourself, which can be a little complicated. For this reason, I had a list of back-up courses in case there was overlap or courses were full. Luckily, neither of those things happened to me, but it did to some others. It really helps to plan your appointment early, because the courses are first come, first serve. Also, you could only change your courses in the first week, so it was nice to 'snoop around' in a few courses, so you could choose the ones you actually like, because the teaching manual is not always very clear.

academic quality of education activities

The academic quality was similar to the UU, but very different between courses. I have taken courses that had barely any reading and only one assignment, that I only spend about an hour a week on, but I also had courses for which you had to write difficult and long research papers. It was very weird to me how big the difference in quality and workload between courses was, even when they were from the same year and the same amount of credits. For that reason, it is nice to pay close attention in the first week, so you can know if a course is too much or not. In general, the quality was similar (if a little lower) than the UU, but the teaching way was different. A lot of teachers here loved making people do presentations, so in some of my courses the teacher rarely talked, just the students did. There were not a lot of assignments per course, usually a project and a final exam/essay. The rest was just participation and attendance, which was also always graded.

counselling & support at receiving university abroad

Luckily, I have not needed a lot of counselling or support at this university. In the beginning, I had some contact with the woman from the International Relations office. She was very nice and helpful, but also clearly had to much work with the amount of Erasmus students and their course/timetable issues. After the first few weeks however, this was all fixed and she always replied to emails quite quickly.

transfer of credits

While I am typing this, not all my grades have been published yet, so the credits have not been transferred either. However, I am assuming this will all work out well.

## STUDENT LIFE

welcome & orientation programme

The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) in Alcalá is really active and big, which was unexpected for me. You had to find the groupchat via the Facebook group, but once you're in the whatsapp group, you hear everything. ESN organised a welcome week with all sorts of activities and there were also just get-togethers of international students. Everybody was very nice and open. ESN also organised an integration weekend, multiple trips all over Spain and all kinds of activities every week. There was a lot to do with them, but sometimes it was a little boring, especially since everybody had their own friend group at some point, and mixing became more difficult. But in general it was very nice and well-organised. The language used during ESN trips/events is 95% English, with only really Spanish for the few people that did not know English. But I spoke a lot of English during all these events.

**Spain – Universidad de Alcalá**

## accommodation

I found my room on Spot A Home, which is a very nice website on which the rooms are checked by officials, so you will not get scammed. The prices there were very manageable, since I only paid €330 for a room at a 5 min walk to the uni and a 10 min walk to the train station. It is important to book a room on time, like at least a month before you arrive, because the people that were late really struggled to find a room, let alone an affordable one. I lived in quite a big house, but it was very quiet, which I liked. I would recommend Spot A Home very much, but pay attention to where your room is on the map and where your classes are. Humanities classes were in the city centre, but some people bought a room in Crusa, which is where the Science courses are, and it is very far away from the centre.

## leisure &amp; culture

Alcalá is a very pretty and historical city. When you walk around, there will always be people taking pictures or getting a tour of the city. The university building is gorgeous and there are a lot of references to Miguel de Cervantes, a famous writer from Alcalá. You can visit his house for free on Calle Mayor, the big shopping and eating street. There is also a shopping centre, Alcalá Magna, which has some more modern stores and also a JYSK (nice for bedsheets, towels, cups, etc.), which is about a 20 min walk or a 10 min bus ride from the city centre. And of course, Madrid is only a 45 minute train ride away. I would recommend going to Madrid at least once every week or two weeks. Madrid is such a big and lively city with thousands of bars, restaurants, cute shops, everything. Alcalá is beautiful and peaceful, but Madrid is very exciting and so very nearby. You can honestly do everything you want there, like go to Retiro park, the Reina Sofía or Prado museum or just wander around. Also, you can get a Tarjeta Transporte with a subscription. For people under 26 years old, the subscription is only €10 a month and you can travel between Alcalá and Madrid and inside Madrid unlimitedly!

## suggestions/tips

I would suggest to go to some ESN events, especially in the beginning. There you will meet so many great people. Also, go explore Madrid quite often, but also enjoy the quietness of Alcalá, where you can also go to great bars and restaurants. You can also take the bus or a high speed train from Madrid to many destinations in Spain. I took a train to Barcelona (2 hours) and Sevilla (2,5 hours) and it was so nice. You can just go for a weekend, and the trains are not that expensive. The bus is even cheaper, but also takes longer. Because Madrid is so central in Spain, there are trains and busses to all over the country, so I would definitely recommend going on a few trips, because it really is so accessible. And most importantly, enjoy your time there, even if it is just sitting in the sun or eating some nice churros.

**CONCLUSIONS**

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

Yes, I would definitely recommend the University of Alcalá. It is situated in a beautiful city that is very close to Madrid, which is of course amazing to visit. The university also has a lot of international students, so you do not ever feel alone and there are always people who can help you. There is also a broad choice of courses to follow here. The city is small, but that also makes it so that you really get to know it and do not feel like a guest or tourist anymore. I think 5 months is the perfect amount of time to stay here, because you see and know everything and also have time to get to know Madrid a bit better.

do you have any additional advice or comments?

I would recommend learning Spanish, at least the basics. There are a lot of English courses at the university, so that should not be a problem. However, people in the stores rarely speak English, so a little bit of Spanish can help you there. But in ESN events we always spoke English, so you can get to know people, even if you do not speak Spanish. Also, I would recommend doing proper research for the courses that you would like to take, before arriving here. Make a list of the ones you like + some back-up options, and then you should be good.

## Report 2

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

destination city & country	Alcalá de Henares, Spain
how did you travel to your destination?	By train
name university abroad	Universidad de Alcalá
start date	07 / 09 / 2022 (dd/mm/yyyy)
end date	23 / 01 / 2023 (dd/mm/yyyy)

### PREPARATION

#### exchange application process

The application process is long and you have to read, sign, send and resend a lot of documents. It is certainly not the most fun part of the whole abroad experience, but necessary of course. Make sure you do everything on time and you won't find any problems with the application.

#### counselling & support at Utrecht University

The support at the UU has been great. The International Office is always in time with signing documents and they are willing to help you whenever you have some troubles with your application or something else. They provide convenient documents that help you with all the steps you have take for and after your application.

#### academic preparation

Since the exchange was in the fourth year of my bachelor, I had three years of academic preparation which was sufficient for the courses I chose.

#### language preparation

My courses were in Spanish. At the end of the first year of my bachelor, Spanish language and culture, you reach a B2 level, which is an adequate level for these classes.

#### finances

With the Erasmus grant you will be able to pay the rent, but it will not be enough to live and enjoy the whole Erasmus experience with all the extra costs. Try to find some other source of income other than a student job during this period, because it will get to busy with studying and all other things that are part of the student life.

### STUDY ABROAD PERIOD

#### study programme (content and organisational issues)

I did get to choose my own courses, so I selected mine within the Humanities department, from different years. I recommend choosing courses from the same year, because I felt that the workload of my classes was a bit to high, compared to other courses.

#### academic quality of education activities

The quality of the courses I took, was good, but a bit too broad. Courses from the last year offered a bit more in-depth knowledge about certain topics in certain fields of investigation, whereas courses from the first year

did not offer this and neither did they give good guidance in academic writing. Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the education, the content of the classes and the texts, provided by the teachers.
counselling & support at receiving university abroad
I found the UAH very welcoming and their support with the application was great. There is one person with who you stay in touch and they provide you help with everything you need.
transfer of credits
All my credits were transferred correctly.

<b>STUDENT LIFE</b>
welcome & orientation programme
The UAH provides a non-obligatory welcome programme for Erasmus students. They will show you all their services and all the things you need to find your way in the school and get started studying. Besides the programme of the University, there is also the international student network who organizes activities during the welcoming days and throughout the whole semester.
accommodation
I found my accommodation in Alcalá on aluni.net which offers a lot of rooms. In contrast to Utrecht, and the rest of the Netherlands, the prices are affordable and the service is great.
leisure & culture
In Alcalá are some nice museums, historical buildings and theaters to visit. Like already mentioned before, there is an international student organisation, the ESN, which offers a lot of cultural and other kinds of activities and parties. I would definitely recommend joining them and discover the Spanish life and culture through their experience.
suggestions/tips
Besides the ESN and the activities of the UAH, you can do a lot on your own. Madrid is close to Alcalá and has a lot to offer, among which some wonderful museums which are free for students. The nature in the region is beautiful and there are a lot of nice walking paths you can follow.

<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>
would you recommend this university/destination abroad to others? please explain
I would definitely recommend this destination, because, besides the experience of studying in this historical university, you will get to know a lot of people and, because Alcalá is not too big, you will keep in touch easily with everyone.
do you have any additional advice or comments?
I lived in Madrid for one and a half month, but I decided to move to Alcalá, because of the travel time to the University and also because Alcalá was a bit more quiet than the hectic life in Madrid. I could still visit Madrid whenever I wanted to and enjoy the good things of the capital. For me this was a really good choice to move to Alcalá, but it is very personal. If you do not mind the hectic, you might prefer living in Madrid. If you were to live in Alcalá, I would recommend getting a room in, or close to the centre.

**2016 – 2017**

**Report 1**

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

destination city & country	Alcalá de Henares, Spain
name university abroad	Universidad de Alcalá
start date	12 / 09 / 2016      (dd/mm/yyyy)
end date	20 / 01 / 2017      (dd/mm/yyyy)

<b>PREPARATION</b>	
exchange application process	I started the application process by doing some research on the possible cities I wanted to go to, but I wasn't accepted in any of the cities of my initial top three. Therefore, when I heard I was accepted at the University of Alcalá, I didn't quite know what to expect. After looking it up all I knew was that Alcalá was a small town close to Madrid. By the time I had to fill in the Learning Agreement for the University of Alcalá, they just had a new way of application for the university: they wanted us to apply online, but because it was the first time they used that program it didn't work. So basically we had to apply twice; once online, and once by mail.
counselling & support at Utrecht University	The International Office can help you out with your questions about studying abroad, but, you have to do a lot on your own. The International Office will let the receiving institution know that you're coming to their university, but apart from that you have to do everything yourself: find accommodation, fill in all the forms, watch the application deadlines and Erasmus Grant deadlines etc.
academic preparation	I already knew I wanted to take courses from the same study programme as I have in Utrecht, so I did not do any academic preparation.
language preparation	Since I already had a B2 level of Spanish, I did not do any language preparation either.
finances	Before going abroad, I calculated what my income would be during my study abroad period. I received 388 euros a month from the government (the grant and the public transport reimbursement) and the Erasmus grant for Spain is 210 euros a month. Besides, I made sure I had some personal savings and I received a monthly contribution from my parents. I found a room for 400 euros a month, so I knew with all my incomes there would be no financial problems and I could still do groceries and participate in all the fun activities.

<b>STUDY ABROAD PERIOD</b>	
study programme (content and organisational issues)	When I arrived in Alcalá I had a meeting with the International Coordinator from my faculty in Alcalá. During the meeting he looked at the courses I had chosen and he tried to sign me up for all of them. Unfortunately, 3 from 5 courses we're already full and I had to choose other courses. It was quite a struggle to make a fitting

<p>timetable, but after some puzzling I made a new timetable and we completed the inscription. Although eventually I was satisfied with the new courses I picked, I was quite disappointed that I didn't get to take all the courses I initially had in mind.</p>
<p>academic quality of education activities</p>
<p>I think the University of Alcalá has a good academic quality, but the way of teaching is quite different in comparison to the University of Utrecht. In my courses there were no group projects and hardly any presentations. It was just listening to the teachers and taking notes, followed by a final exam. For some courses I had to hand in exercises during the semester, but as I said, the classes were not really interactive: the teacher talks and you listen and take notes. Personally it didn't really bother me, I just realised that it was quite a big difference compared to the classes in the Netherlands.</p>
<p>counselling &amp; support at receiving university abroad</p>
<p>I didn't have any problems during my stay abroad, just in the beginning with the unavailable courses, but once that was solved, I didn't go to the International Coordinator anymore because luckily everything went well for me. I do think that they were all very kind at the University of Alcalá and used to receiving many international students. Most of the teachers were helpful towards me, but there were also teachers who didn't really care whether or not Spanish is your native language; they treated the Erasmus students as if they were Spanish students, which I don't think is a fair treatment. I haven't had a lot of problems with that but I know some of my friends had a difficult time because some teacher just wouldn't cooperate and were quite rude to the Erasmus students.</p>
<p>transfer of credits</p>
<p>Since I'm still waiting for my results, I can't say anything about the transfer of credits. All I know is that they will send me a transcript of records in the beginning of March, and that I will receive 30 ECTS if I passed all my courses (the courses at the University of Alcalá are worth 6 ECTS each).</p>

<p><b>STUDENT LIFE</b></p>	
<p>welcome &amp; orientation programme</p>	<p>Like many cities, Alcalá also has an Erasmus Student Network (ESN). The people from ESN Alcalá are really motivated, but sometimes there weren't a lot of students at the activities. ESN Alcalá organized a welcome week for all the Erasmus students, but they only published this in the ESN Alcalá facebook group. Since I didn't know this group existed, I found out quite late about the welcome days. They don't organise so many activities compared to for example the universities in Madrid, but that's because it's a younger and smaller ESN and I think they really put a lot of effort in everything they do. What I liked best were the trips they organised to Valencia, Lisbon etc.</p>
<p>accommodation</p>	<p>During my stay in Alcalá, I was living in a room I found on the website of Dunia Hall. Dunia Hall is a student residence and the photos looked fine online so I sent them an email. I initially wanted a single bedroom with my own bathroom, but since they only had shared bedrooms left, I emailed them back if they had any other options for me. It turned out they had another building, recently renovated, with a room available. It was slightly more expensive than a room in the residence, but I would have my own bedroom and share the bathroom with one girl. I shared the kitchen with just four people. Important is that they charge you extra money if your stay is shorter than 6 months, so I paid 409 euros a month for quite a small bedroom while my housemate had a much bigger bedroom and paid less because she was staying the whole year. Nevertheless I was happy with my room and the clean renovated kitchen. I could recommend Dunia Hall (the apartment, I was not in the residence), but I also know that you can find much cheaper rooms in Alcalá.</p>

leisure & culture
Alcalá is the city of the famous writer Miguel de Cervantes, so you will find a lot of things related to him and/or the <i>Quijote</i> , for example the house where he was born. The university buildings are beautiful and have a large and prestigious history. Most of the action takes place in the Calle Mayor, the main street. Here you will find shops, bars and (tapas) restaurants. However for some proper shopping you should go by bus to Alcalá Magna, the shopping centre. Also, Madrid is just 40 minutes by train, so I would really recommend going there to see its beautiful city centre, Retiro park, the museums, and for partying of course. Alcalá has a few nice places to go out, for example the Green (considered the Erasmus bar), an Irish pub. Also Hanoi is a nice lounge bar/club to have drinks and after 03h they open the dancefloor. Same goes for Casco Antiguo, another club only worth going to after 03h, because the nightlife starts really late in Spain. First you eat and you have drinks in a bar before you go dancing at 03h. Alcalá has nice restaurants and bars, as well as pretty square and main street, but it's not a lot so it's always nice to take the bus or train to Madrid for some more action.
suggestions/tips
Go to a lot of ESN activities and trips to get to know new people and enjoy your stay in Spain. It sounds super cliché but it really goes by so fast and if you like the Spanish culture and people you are going to love living there. Also, in the Calle Mayor is a super nice restaurant called the Rollerie, where you can go for breakfast/lunch/coffee/dinner etc. If you're there, order the 'rol de canela' (cinnamon roll) with white chocolate! I can't even remember how much of those I ate during my stay here...

<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>
would you recommend this university/destination abroad to others? please explain
In my opinion the University of Alcalá is a good university, with a lot of history and really familiar with receiving international students, so I would recommend this university. Alcalá is a good destination if you don't want to live in a big city. It's small and you will walk into people you know when going out or just walking in the city centre. Personally I like living in a smaller city, so for me it was perfectly fine, although I think that 5 months is enough time to see it all. Having a big city like Madrid close by was a big advantage, because you have the benefits of a big city but you don't have to live there. So yes, I can recommend Alcalá for a short period of studying there.
do you have any additional advice or comments?
It could be a problem if you don't speak Spanish, because basically everything is in Spanish (welcome day at the university, tours during the ESN trips, etc) and Spanish people hardly speak English in general. There is, however, a good language institute, Alcalingua, that offers a lot of Spanish courses on different levels. Also, most of the courses only allow a few Erasmus students, so make sure you make an appointment as soon as possible with the International Coordinator (who will sign you up for the courses), because first come, first get.

**Report 2**

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

destination city & country	Alcalá de Henares, Spain
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name university abroad	Universidad de Alcalá
start date	12 / 09 / 2016 (dd/mm/yyyy)
end date	20 / 01 / 2017 (dd/mm/yyyy)

<b>PREPARATION</b>
exchange application process
<p>We were told in advance that it would be quite a lot of waiting and quite a lot of work, and both those things were very true. Firstly, I did my research for what university I wanted to go to. Unlike the other two Erasmus students from the UU that went to Alcalá, I was the only one that actually had Alcalá as my first choice. For me, Alcalá seemed like a nice city, not too big like Madrid, but close enough that everything you need is still available within a short period of time. The application process, for as long as the UU was involved, went smoothly, but when it was time to let the UAH handle things, it became a little clumsy. They were trying out a new online application system, which wasn't working for me and some other Erasmus students. They solved this by sending the old application form from last year, and have us email that to them separately. We also had to send all our information by post to the UAH, which was interesting. In the end, it took a little while to fully complete the application process, but eventually everything was handed in and the process finished.</p>
counselling & support at Utrecht University
<p>I wouldn't say that there is a lot of counselling and support from the Utrecht University in the way of individual needs, but I would say that the International Office did a great job at helping future Erasmus students. They warn you ahead of time that it will be a lot of work and that you will need to work with certain set deadlines that are very important. They don't downplay the amount of work it will be, but they do their very best to show students that going on Erasmus abroad really is worth their time. They are also very helpful in answering questions via email, even if it's on very short notice, and they're always polite, which can really help settle the nerves, which will undoubtedly arise if you're applying for Erasmus.</p>
academic preparation
<p>There was little specific academic preparation. I had made sure in advance that all my courses would be in English, just like my courses at the UU. I was also not told before arriving here in Alcalá and talking to the head of the International Office here whether I would actually be following the courses that I applied for, so up until arrival, there really was nothing to be done for academic preparation.</p>
language preparation
<p>For my courses, there was no preparation necessary. I knew that my English would definitely be good enough to follow the courses here. For my daily life, however, it was a little more difficult. What I did in preparation for Spanish was to start learning it through several suggested websites and applications, so there would be a nice gradual shift upwards in learning. When I came here, I quickly realized that Spanish was a lot more important than I realized. Everything is in Spanish here, also the activities organized by the Erasmus Student Network. Even my 'buddy', whom they assured would speak English, spoke only a few words and was very uninterested in helping me. Even most other Erasmus students (who could speak English) would refuse to speak anything but Spanish to me. This caused me to be quite lost and quite dependent in the beginning of my Erasmus period, and I would definitely recommend that other students going to Alcalá, who aren't conversational yet to learn as quickly as they can (although I do figure that I am the odd duck out, and most people coming here from the UU will probably already speak Spanish).</p>
finances
<p>I personally had no struggles with finances. I worked long days in the summer to build up a buffer, and</p>

combined with the Erasmus grant and the additional government funds (studiefinanciering uitwonend + OV-vergoeding), everything worked out for me. I would however definitely recommend people to not just rely on the grant and other funds, because while that will cover the basic expenses, I found it very relaxing knowing that I could also go on excursions and trips with the money I'd earned over the summer.

### STUDY ABROAD PERIOD

#### study programme (content and organisational issues)

The big problem for me was that you were not told much in advance. I chose three literature courses (out of the four I did there), and I had a lot of reading to do, but I was never told when to read what book until the last moment. There is no clear course manual that tells you when what is due, which is really stressful, because you know that any moment you may be told that there's an exam next week. I also had the struggle that one teacher only send a message to the class president (about exams, classes being cancelled etc.), and the class president would send it to the rest of the class, but she didn't send it to Erasmus students. Overall, it was a bit messy, and could definitely be improved upon.

#### academic quality of education activities

I thought it was fine. All my courses were in English, so I knew that the accent and pronunciation of English from teachers wouldn't be as good as I'm used to at the UU, but despite that, the teachers still sounded very knowledgeable. It is of course a shame to listen to an interesting topic being told by a teacher in flawed English, because it makes it sound like the teacher doesn't know what they're talking about. But once you ignore the English, there's a lot to learn, and the academic quality was not too different than what I'm used to.

#### counselling & support at receiving university abroad

This was a little non-existent. There was one man at the International Office for the whole Humanities department that was available to help, which sometimes meant that you had to wait a long time before you were able to make an appointment with him, or to receive a reply. I was lucky to have only needed him once (and I still had to wait over an hour after the actual time of our appointment due to the large amount of people that needed his help), but I have heard stories of other people who weren't so lucky. This is definitely something that would need to be improved.

#### transfer of credits

Both the UU and the UAH work with the normal ECTS system, and while at the moment of writing this I haven't received a Transcript of Records yet, I will assume that everything should continue smoothly.

### STUDENT LIFE

#### welcome & orientation programme

There is a welcome week arranged by ESN Alcalá, which is mostly a tour through the city, tapas tours, and fun stuff like that, and there is a welcome day arranged by the university a week after the start of the semester. For me, again, the biggest problem was that there were no accommodations for non-Spanish speaking Erasmus students. On the university's welcome day, there was one speaker that spoke English, but everything else was in Spanish, and literally everything from ESN Alcalá was in Spanish. At first I was disappointed, of course, because I felt that Erasmus meant that it should be international, but it wasn't at all. Later I got used to being excluded all the time, but it wasn't until I spoke with a girl from one of the universities from Madrid, that I realized that it wasn't normal for ESN Alcalá to do everything in Spanish. Apparently the other ESNs from other universities had mostly bilingual activities. So, that was my biggest disappointment, that there was very little to no effort done to include non-Spanish speakers.

accommodation
<p>While the location was great, I would not recommend my accommodation to anyone else. I stayed in Dunia Hall, which was a rough five minute walk to the center of the city, which was my main reason for picking this accommodation, but it's not worth it. Firstly, it's heavily overpriced. They charge extra if you stay less than a whole year, and I had to pay 15% extra, because I was staying under 5 months, but that was only by a few days. A friend of mine also stayed under 5 months, and she was only charged 10% extra, because she arrived a few days earlier than I did. But regardless, the price is already expensive for Spanish standards and the 10 or 15% extra just makes it more ridiculous. Secondly, you have to sign a long contract full of rules that state you can't smoke inside, make noise after a certain hour etc., and that is completely disregarded. My room was near the kitchen, and often people would play music, scream, clap, sing, anything, way after curfew time. I understand that it was a student accommodation, but I figured that the contract would keep that from happening, but it didn't. So the first month I could hardly sleep. Thirdly, the only available room was a shared room for me, and my roommate was just awful, and I had to deal with her for three months, and they couldn't do anything about her, so I was just stuck with her. And fourthly, it claims that it's an international residence, and it's simply not. Three international students in an accommodation that houses like fifty of sixty Spanish students does not make it an international residence.</p>
leisure & culture
<p>I thought Alcalá was great for leisure and culture. It wasn't a very big city, but it had a lot of history and culture to explore. Its location was also great for easy access to Madrid, and therefore to the whole country. There were several malls in Alcalá, and also plenty of shopping opportunities a little further away, without immediately being in Madrid. There were also a lot of smaller cities nearby, such as Toledo and Segovia, which were easily accessible and great to explore.</p>
suggestions/tips
<p>Enjoy the sun in Alcalá, explore small streets and enjoy the utter Spanish atmosphere that lingers everywhere. Use its location to your advantage, if you want a quiet afternoon, you can relax on the Calle Mayor, and if you feel like going somewhere busy, you can be in Madrid very easily. Also, if you like exploring, check out where you can go with Alsa busses for example. I went to Granada for two days, and with Alsa you pay very little for a very comfortable bus trip. Especially if you don't like flying or are only going for a short period, the bus is a great way to go.</p>

<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>
would you recommend this university/destination abroad to others? please explain
<p>Yes, I would recommend going to Alcalá for your Erasmus. I would however like to tell whoever is thinking of going to really be prepared. If you're like me, and think you'll be fine learning Spanish after you've arrived, that's not true. If I hadn't found friends who were willing to translate for me, I would have been very screwed. I would really recommend speaking Spanish on at least a conversational level before you go. Also, be prepared for the Spanish tempo: everything will happen very very slowly, that's just how it goes. Otherwise, yes, go for it. It's a lovely town with a lot of students, it's got plenty of opportunities to have a drink or a bite with friends, and especially when the sun is out (which is often) the whole place looks great.</p>
do you have any additional advice or comments?
-

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

destination city & country	Alcalá de Henares, Spain
name university abroad	Universidad de Alcalá de Henares
start date	12 / 09 / 2016 (dd/mm/yyyy)
end date	20 / 01 / 2017 (dd/mm/yyyy)

### PREPARATION

#### exchange application process

First I did some research on the possible cities I wanted to go to, but I wasn't accepted in any of the cities of my initial top three, so when I heard I was accepted at the University of Alcalá, I didn't know what to expect. All I knew was that Alcalá would be a nice small town to live in, with the perk that it was close to Madrid. The year I went to Alcalá, they just had a new way of application for the university, they wanted us to apply online, but because it was the first time they used that program, it didn't work, so basically we applied twice; once online, and once through the mail. It's also good to know that the courses from last year aren't necessarily available in your year, and there is a lot of overlap between the courses, which you will only notice when you're in Alcalá.

#### counselling & support at Utrecht University

When you are applying for your stay abroad, the University in Utrecht already tells you that you will have to do a lot yourself. You have to do more yourself than you can imagine, which is not a problem and understandable, because the International Office in Utrecht can't arrange everything for every student in Utrecht. Basically, the only thing the International Office does, is telling the university you're going to that you'll be coming there, the rest of the communication is up to you. Again, it is not a problem, just something you have to keep in mind.

#### academic preparation

In Utrecht I study Spanish, which was a good preparation, since all my courses would be in Spanish.

#### language preparation

Since learning Spanish is part of my study in Utrecht, I didn't have to prepare my language skills, but the University of Alcalá does require a Language Proficiency Form, stating that you're Spanish is at least at B2 level. Even though the University of Utrecht tells you you don't need it, you do, and if you don't give them the Language Proficiency Form, you have to do a test when you get there, so they can test you're level of Spanish.

#### finances

I lived in a very expensive room, in a residence close to the city center. It was nice, because it was so close to everything, but way too expensive compared to the other rooms in the city. Because of this I had to use my savings, because I didn't want to not travel with ESN for example. The grant can be enough, but if you want to live the Erasmus life to the fullest, it can be nice to have some extra money which you can use.

### STUDY ABROAD PERIOD

#### study programme (content and organisational issues)

Here in Alcalá the courses are not 7,5 ECTS like in Utrecht, most of the courses are 6 ECTS, and some are 8.

**Spain – Universidad de Alcalá**

Because you still have to earn 30 ECTS, I tried to do 5 courses, but it turned out to be too much work, so after a month I dropped one course, and followed 4 instead.

- Arabic (course dropped) - was a nice course, you learned the Arabic language at a nice pace, but the workload was just too much.

- Didactic - also a nice course, the professor was understanding that it was more difficult for the Erasmus students than the natives, and tried to help us.

- Morphology of the Spanish Language - for the native people it was a good course, but if you are not a native speaker, it is way too difficult, since one of the parts of morphology is to divide words into smaller words, which is impossible to do with a non-native vocabulary. Also, the professor did not want Erasmus students in his class, and did not want to help us.

- Ancient Greek - a good course, you learn to translate ancient Greek, with a focus on the influence of Greek on the Spanish language. The professor was nice and tried to help everyone understand the Greek language.

- History of the Spanish words - a nice course, the lectures were about the influence of Latin and Greek on the Spanish words nowadays.

#### academic quality of education activities

The quality was good, but very Spanish, in a way of unclarity. Sometimes, because of the language problem, I missed some information, like the exact content of an exam, and when I asked my fellow Spanish students, often they didn't know it either. But all in all, I think the quality is good.

#### counselling & support at receiving university abroad

In Spain you also have to do things yourself, mostly they will not remind you about the things you have to do. The person in charge of the Erasmus students did speak English, which was good, since it was hard to find an English speaking person. When you have a problem, like I did with wanting to drop a course, he was very helpful.

#### transfer of credits

Since I am writing this while I am still in Alcalá, and do not yet have my credits, I have no idea, but the University will send me my marks via e-mail, and a hard copy to the International Office.

## STUDENT LIFE

#### welcome & orientation programme

I have the feeling that ESN here is quite a young organization, since there are a lot of small mistakes. For instance, the welcome programme was only communicated to us through a private Facebook group, from which we weren't a member the first days. The welcome week had some nice activities, like a tapas tour through Alcalá, and a tour to tell you more about the city in which you will be living for the next 5 months.

#### accommodation

As mentioned before, I lived in a residence (Dunia Hall), which was expensive compared to the rent that the other students had to pay (330 euros each month for Dunia, compared to 250 or 280 for other places). I shared my room and bathroom with another student from Canada, which was nice, because you already have to talk in the morning, because you both have to wake up to go to class. I shared the kitchen with all the people of my floor, roughly 20 people, which means that you can not leave your stuff around, because it will be stolen/used/broken. I would not recommend living here, because it is so expensive, and I think there are a lot of rooms available in Alcalá when you get here, so I don't think it's hard to go here without a place to stay. Also ESN has a deal with a hotel, I think when you can say or show that you're an Erasmus student, you get 10% discount, so you have a place to stay before you have your own room.

#### leisure & culture

**Spain – Universidad de Alcalá**

Alcalá is a small town, which means there is not much to do, except for the birth house of Cervantes, a really famous Spanish writer, and a church. But luckily, Madrid is only 40 minutes by train, so you can go there easily. When you like to shop, it's hard to do that in Alcalá, but again, Madrid is just around the corner. You can go party here, there are just not that many options, you have the Green Irish Pub, which is famous among Erasmus students, and a few other places to go. ESN organises some trips through Spain as well, which is a good way to meet new people from all around the world.

suggestions/tips

When you get here, don't forget to enjoy your stay here, it is different from your studies in Utrecht, probably you will never be in Spain for five months, so just enjoy! It's over faster than you can imagine...

**CONCLUSIONS**

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

If you like being in a small city, it's a nice place. It's nice to sit at a restaurant or walk through Alcalá and see and recognize the other Erasmus students and talk to them. I don't think it will be like that when you are in Madrid for example, just because there are so many people there. But if you want to do stuff, like going to the movies or something like that, that's nearly impossible in Alcalá, you're almost always forced to go to Madrid.

do you have any additional advice or comments?

It is good to know that everything will be in Spanish, so if you can't speak Spanish, it can cause problems. The welcome day from the university will be in Spanish, all the trips from ESN will be in Spanish. There is a good language institute related to the university, Alcalingua, which can help you learn Spanish, and if I'm not mistaking, you can get ECTS for the course you take there, but I'm not sure.

Also, most of the courses only let in 4 or 5 Erasmus students, so when you have to talk to the person who will sign you up for the courses, make an appointment there as soon as possible, because first come, first get.

The weather here is not as Spanish as you would think, in December and January most people here wore gloves outside.

If you want to live in a residence, be careful where it is located, there are 3 or 4 at the external campus, and as a Humanities student, I think all your classes will be in the city center, and there are nice rooms available in the center, so you do not have to live far away.