

## A Dutch girl in Belgium

You have decided you want to go study abroad, now the problem of the destination occurs. You should choose a destination which makes sense for you. Don't go somewhere because your friends are applying for that destination, and make a list why you want to go to a specific destination. I wanted my period abroad to be an experience, like everyone else. Another very important point for me was that their education was from a quite high level. This is probably the main reason why I chose to study from 15 September 2014 till the 31<sup>st</sup> of January at the University of Leuven in Belgium.

## Before you go

### Accommodation

As an exchange student staying for one semester only it will be difficult to find an accommodation. The landlords are seldom prepared to sign a rental contract for less than 10 months. The university offers some website on which you can search for housing, but again, this is mostly for a period of 10 or 12 months. So when you are staying for one semester only you really need to find a room being sublet by Belgian students who study abroad or are in training for one semester. In order to find such a room, I suggest to go there early. I found mine already in June when I went there for the weekend. The university offers some residences as well, I am not quite sure if this is available for one semester only. These residences are also rented to Belgian students, so there will be a long waiting list to find a room in the residences.

## After you get there

One of the first things you have to do is contact your faculty's administrative coordinator to obtain permission for registration as an Erasmus/exchange-student at KU Leuven. Your coordinator will give you your letter of acceptance that you need for inscription at the University Hall. He or she will also give you your learning agreement. Within 8 days of arrival, you have to register at the Foreigners' Office. In doing so, you need to have a proof of registration at the university. Although this seems quite easy, you have to remember that the official semester only starts at the end of semester. In case you arrive earlier, like I did, the campus is almost empty and the contact hours aren't that much. Another important remark is that you are required to have a permanent address before going to the Foreigners' Office, which causes some problems for students who didn't arrange their accommodation in front.

## Courses

### Economic Aspects of the European Integration (6ECTS)

I think this was the most interesting course I took during the semester. The course is about international economics and what changes are made by the deeper European integration. The book was interesting enough to read and not that difficult. For economic students this course is not that hard because you do have an understanding about tariffs etcetera. For students who are not quite familiar with some economic background the course will be pretty hard. You have to know how tariffs work and what their influence is on the world price, the home price and the boarder price. You learn to understand what kind of rules are made by different treaties, and you get familiar with the consequences of free trade.

### The history of the low countries at the crossroads of history (6ECTS)

This is by definition the most boring course I have ever attended. At first, I thought the course would be nice and interesting because you get to know a little bit about the history of the Low Countries, but it wasn't. The Prof was very boring and telling stories about everything and nothing. There is so much stuff you need to know, with dates and names and everything. In case you aren't really interested in all the details, this course will be way too

boring and hard to study. Personally, I think the course was really hard and too much information to know for only 6 ECTS. Another thing which I didn't like at all was the exam. After studying so many hours to know everything about the dates and names and so on, the exam consists only of 4 questions and captures not even a quarter of the learning material. The only good thing about it was that you had to write a paper which counted for 7 of the maximum of 20 points. I think this paper probably saved me in the end.

#### Financial Statement Analysis (6 ECTS)

This was actually a master course, but I decided to take it anyway. This choice was quite easy for me because I like accounting. The lectures were really well organized and explained. The course is not that hard if you keep up to date, and don't postpone! The learning material was quite a lot, so studying a week in front of the test won't save you. In Belgium they use the accounting standards of US GAAP, instead, the Erasmus University uses IFRS. In the beginning this was really a problem. You think you know how to make some journal entries and do the accounting, but you are wrong because you use the wrong accounting standards. But after a few weeks you are used to it, and the course will be doable.

#### Entrepreneurial Finance (3 ECTS)

This finance course was a master course as well. You are talking about different options of the entrepreneur and how to value them. Also the financing of different types of firms are taken into account. The course was really nice, and sometimes connections were made to the Financial Statement Analysis course. You do need to have some understanding about corporate finance before taking this course. One thing I didn't like about this course was that it didn't offer that much examples or questions. So you read the theory but you are not able to test yourself whether you really understand the theory and the calculations you have to make. The Prof added some questions in the lectures, but she only explained those during the lectures. In case you are ill or you just don't attend the course, you don't have the answers.

#### Externe Financiële Verslaggeving (6 ECTS)

I was able to choose from a lot of courses, also the ones taught in Dutch. Externe Financiële Verslaggeving was a Dutch course for bachelor students. The first part of the course consisted of bookkeeping, which was really easy. You have to understand how to make journal entries for different types of transactions and for different types of firms. Students who are familiar with this or don't think this is that difficult, this part of the course is easy. The second part was more about the financial statements of companies. During the lectures and while studying you won't face any problems. The problem arises during the exam. The exam is just a case and you need to answer some questions. The problem was that you needed to know the answers from before you were able to calculate b and so on. So when you have problems solving question a, you are stuck.

#### German (3 ECTS)

I really wanted to improve my German, so I decided to take a German course which was taught in Dutch. You get familiar with the grammar, but this was from a quite high level. There was a midterm test which was really easy. At the end of the course you had to give a presentation about a German company of your own choice. This presentation counted for 4/20 points. The funny thing was that there were a few weeks in which we only did presentations and talking. In those hours we had a different Prof, a German woman. She wasn't able to speak Dutch, only French and German so this was quite funny. For the Belgian students this wasn't a problem at all, because most of them know the French language.

I used the courses to bring them into my elective space.

## Finances

The room prices in Leuven vary widely. There are a lot of rooms available for only €250,- per month but there are also studios for over the €650,-. I didn't want to live in a very big house and I wanted my own bathroom, so this drives up the prices for your rental. Compared to

some bigger cities, you don't need any train tickets or bus tickets to get to the university. The university buildings are located at different locations in the city, all of them are in walking distance. Another option is buying or renting a bike, but keep in mind that some streets are only one-way streets! I went to my hometown one weekend a month or something. And off course, I took a lot of groceries with me when going back. But if you need to do all your groceries in Leuven it won't be that cheap. Students who like to eat chicken, beef and fish have to pay more than in the Netherlands. The amount of groceries in the table below is for most of other students not comparable. Like I said, I took a lot with me from home and some friends came one weekend or so every month and they brought a lot with them from my parents. One thing that is much and much cheaper compared to the Netherlands is alcohol. As an exchange student you get free access to some sport facilities, the only thing you have to pay for is the gym and some group courses.

Monthly costs:

Rental	€425
Groceries	€50
Going out etc.	€150
Mobile Phone	€15
Transport (home)	€20
Total	€660

## Daily Life

Leuven is a great city, and you are close to other cities in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and France.

In a normal week I had three days of school, Monday till Wednesday. I met two lovely girls from Germany and we spent the other days most of the times together. Thursday or Friday was always coffee day. In Leuven you can find the best coffee café there is, with all kind of different and crazy coffees. We went here at least one time per week. If you like cocktail bars, you find yourself lucky in Leuven. Friday or Saturday night was always cocktail night, and we spent the evenings at a bar with a menu card or more than 200 cocktails. For students who like going out, there are plenty of options. Monday till Thursday every bar is open till late, and the Friday nights are for international students. Everything is closed on Sundays, so don't try to do your groceries then! I went to the gym 3 times a week or something. We went to Brussels, Antwerp, Maastricht, Köln, Hasselt and Mechelen. If you want to you can go to much more places.

Romira van Tuijl  
366392