Erasmus Experience report in University of Groningen Faculty of Economics and Business

Zheng Hanwen
Groningen, Netherlands
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I took part in Erasmus+ program and luckily I got the opportunity to stay study abroad in Groningen for 2018/19 fall semester. It is not easy to start over to live in a new environment, meet new people, but I would say choosing to exchange to Groningen is the best decision I have made in my life.

Figure 1 Me and Other 5 exchange students in FEB

**University**

Among the courses I took, I would say 60% of students are international students and exchange students. English is commonly used.

The study in University of Groningen is intensive. One semester is divided into two blocks and students have to take 3 courses each block. Each block only has seven weeks, which means that students have to absorb the knowledge of one course within 7 weeks. This requires a lot of self leaning as the professor can only give you a quick overview of what we a going to learn. Usually, one course has one lecture and one tutorial each week.

In University of Groningen, there is a website called Student portal that is similar to the Moodle in Corvinus University. The professor will upload lecture slides and some professors will event upload lecture recording that is really helpful for the study. There are also some university news and events on the website.

There are two campuses in University of Groningen. For the students enrolled in Faculty of Economics and Business including myself, we study in Zernike Campus. The architectures in Zernike Campus are modern are built in recent years. The other campus is in the city centre, It has longer history.
In Zernike Campus, there is a facility called FEB’s research lab, which is my favourite place in Zernike. Students can register themselves on StudentPortal in order to participate in Research Lab. There are many social experiments in the labs, students can choose the experiments that they are interested in to participate. Each experiments takes one hour, however, I usually finish one experiment in minutes. They paid 8 euro as compensation for each experiment and sometimes there are bonus. FEB’s research lab is really an awesome place for people who are interested in social science, psychology, human behaviours. And if you want to earn some money you should take part in research lab as well.

The university also organizes careers week and Master weeks. In careers week, there are many lecturers or students come to the university to give instruction to students who are looking for internship or jobs. There is also a workshop in the city centre beside the university library. They offer free checks of CV, LinkedIn, and cover letters. These facilities allowed me to gain more insights to my future career and Master study.

**Transportation**

The basic transportation tool for Dutch people and incoming students in Groningen is bike. The public transportation in Groningen is quite expensive. Therefore, riding a bike is an important skill if you want to come to the Netherlands. Before I went to the Netherlands, I could not ride a bike, because the transportation in China and Hungary is cheap and convenient, cycling is not necessary. What is more, I am afraid that I might get hurt if I fall down from bike. However, when I checked the price of monthly pass in the Netherlands, I decided to learn to ride a bike in 2018 summer holidays without hesitation.

In the opening day of the university, every student is given a handbook of cycling rules in the Netherlands. Rules like where you are allowed to ride a bike and where
you are not allowed, front and back lights should be turned on if you are riding your bike in the evening. These rules are important to learn for safety reasons and some students get a fine because they do not follow these rules.

When I am a little bit familiar with the city, I started to look for a bike. My colleges and landlady suggested me to rent a bike from Swapfiets instead of buying a second hand bike, as you cannot resell your bike for a good price and Swapfiets seems to be a better deal. There are two types of plans that you can choose from Swapfiets, Original and Deluxe 7. Original plan only cost 12 euro for students, however, this type of bike does not have hand brakes. As I am a bike beginner and not used to ride a bike without hand brakes, therefore, I had to go with Deluxe 7 which costs 19 euro. Then I made an appointment online and go to the bike shop to try out the bike. However, thing did not go well as I thought, the staff in the shop told me that the bike did not fit my height, they could not rent the bike to me.

Then I had to look for bikes in second hand bike shops, the price of second hand bike range from 70 euro – 200 euro. After visiting almost all the bike shops in Groningen, I finally found a bike that fit my height and with an acceptable price, 120 euro. And then they helped me installed a lock with the cost of 20 euro. This is really a bad deal. After I visit a local grocery store, I found that a lock only cost 2-5 euro and a basket only cost 7 euro, but in the bike shop they are asking for 25 euro for a basket. I would suggest the future incoming students that go to Auction to buy the basket and lock, and do not buy them in bike stores!
Accommodation

For most of foreign students, housing is a big problem. The accommodation in Groningen is expensive and difficult to find. The university does not provide dormitory, which means that students have to find the accommodation on themselves. There are some international student houses in the city, price range from 350-450 euro. However, there are very limited rooms as well, so if you want to live in the international student house, you have to register in the website as early as possible, otherwise all the rooms will be booked. At the beginning of the May in 2018, I was preparing for the final exams in the Corvinus University and did not register at the international student house at the first place, and when I finished all the exams, all rooms in the international student houses are booked. As a result, I have to look for rooms from private owners.

There are websites that are recommended by the university like Lefier and Karmernet. On Lefier, you have to pay around 20 euro as an agency, so that they will look for rooms for you, but most of rooms are without furniture. I found a room on Karmernet with 450 euro per month. And you have to pay a certain amount of fee in order to contact the owner, and most of students encounter the same problem is that the owners do not reply. Therefore, if you are going to find a room on Karmernet, you need you send as much messages as possible to the owners so that you will have a greater opportunity to find a room.

Activities and volunteering

It is quite easy to find a volunteer work in Groningen even though you do not speak Dutch. So if you are interested in doing community work, Groningen is a good place for you. I did 2 months of volunteer work in Non Fiction Photo. They exhibit photo from winning photos of world press photo competition. You can have an overview of the past year news from those photos.

I also worked as a board member of Association of Chinese Students and Scholars in Groningen. I helped plan the events and publicity. We organized the
events like Lunar New year’s gala in Groningen, Basketball competition in Groningen and Groningen League of Legends Tournament.

By actively participating in Association of Chinese Students and Scholars in Groningen, I had the chance to visit Groningen Local Election, even though I am not allowed to vote, but it is still exited to know more about the political system in Groningen.

During my half year in the Netherlands, I was also luckily invited to visit Mars's Factory, one of the world’s largest chocolate factory. I got the opportunity to see how Snickers and Twix were produced. And I also got the opportunity to talk to financial associates and gain more knowledge of how finance works in a real business world.

There are amazing museums in the city centre and most of them are free to students!

Overall, I am really appreciated that Erasmus gave me this opportunity to study aboard so that I had the opportunity to live and study in such a lively and beautiful country. Starting over in a new country, a new environment definitely pushes me out of my comfort zone. I improved my communication skills, interpersonal skills, self learning ability and etc. I will recommend University of Groningen to anyone who considering study abroad without hesitation.
Beautiful sights in the Netherlands

The following pictures are taken beside the Zernike Campus.

Prinsentuin in Groningen

Lights in Eindhoven

Figure 7 Martini Tower