



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	Leiden University
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 1 2025
Otago degree(s)	LLB and BA
Major(s)	Law and Politics

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
Public International Law	English	LAWS400
Border Criminologies: The Criminalization of Mobility	English	LAWS400
Ontwikkelingsvraagstukken in de Internationale Politiek (Development Issues in International Politics)	English	POLS300
Politiek van de Europese Unie (Politics of the European Union)	English	POLS300
State, Politics and Economy in Modern South and Southeast Asia	English	ARTS100
Introduction to the History of the Netherlands	English	ARTS100

Total Otago credits gained: 54 points 72 points 108 points _____

Any comments about these papers?

Border Criminologies and the two ARTS papers mostly had exchange students in them so are good for meeting other people who are on exchange, and the rest that I did were mostly Dutch students.

Public International Law is split into 6 topics, with a new topic each week. Some of these topics overlap with papers at Otago (International Law, International Criminal Court, International Human Rights Law and International Environmental Law), so if you've done any of those papers then this paper will be easier (but either way it probably won't be too hard). I liked this paper because it gave a good overview

of different types of international law, and there was also a good number of exchange students taking this one too so I knew a few people in lectures. You will need to buy the yellow textbook (Elementary International Law) because you can take this into the exam, but you probably don't need to buy the blue one (An Introduction to Public International Law).

Development Issues in International Politics was a really interesting paper and was all about why some countries are more developed than others and how to develop those countries that are underdeveloped. Overall I found that the papers at Leiden were well connected to current events and they were all pretty interesting.

How did the academic experience/ workload/ style of teaching differ from Otago?

All of the papers that I did went for half a semester (and had two lectures or tutorials a week), aside from the ARTS100 papers which went for the full semester (and had one lecture a week). All lectures/tutorials go for 1 hour 45 minutes, with a short break in the middle. The ARTS papers I did weren't recorded (I don't think that many/any of the humanities papers are) and neither was Border Criminologies (and Border Criminologies had compulsory attendance), but the lectures for the rest of my papers were recorded and the recordings were released about 2 weeks before the exam. The only papers that I had assignments for were the ARTS papers and Border Criminologies, and all had an exam apart from Border Criminologies which had a final assignment instead. Border Criminologies was good because the second lecture each week we would watch a documentary for most of the lecture.

Overall the workload was definitely less than at Otago and I found the exams to be easier.

Accommodation

What accommodation did you stay in? What were the pros and cons of your accommodation?

I stayed in Hugo de Grootstraat 32 (one of the DUWO buildings), and I think it's one of the best buildings to stay if you're going on exchange to Leiden. It's quite close to the town centre and only a few minutes bike from the law building, humanities buildings and the library (about a 10 minute bike to the social sciences building and 15 minutes to the biosciences park). I think that HKM is also in a pretty good location, with the main difference between the two being that HKM mostly has studios and Hugo mostly has rooms with a shared kitchen and bathroom on each floor. There are a few other DUWO buildings in Leiden but they are further away from Uni and town so I would definitely recommend either Hugo or HKM depending on whether you want a room or a studio. In some of the other buildings you also have the option to share a room with someone else, and some rooms in other buildings might not be furnished so make sure you check that. If you do choose to stay in Hugo I would recommend either the first, second or third floor because occasionally people have parties/events in the ground floor common room and this can get quite loud. I stayed on the second floor which doesn't have a common room but it was still good.

DUWO also has some buildings in The Hague, so if your classes are in The Hague I would recommend staying in one of those because the trains in the Netherlands aren't very cheap if you're taking them often, so it will get quite expensive going to The Hague from Leiden for all of your classes. In saying that I would definitely recommend staying in Leiden and taking classes only at the Leiden campus if you can. Leiden is very much a student city and you'll be able to meet lots of exchange students staying there.

If you do choose to stay in a DUWO building (which is probably the easiest option because finding accommodation another way can be quite difficult), make sure you apply as soon as you're able to because it's first come first served. Once you get access to view all of the DUWO rooms (a couple hours

before the rooms are released) you should rank your top 10-15 and have them on different tabs so that when the rooms are released you can apply as soon as possible and move onto the next one if you don't get your first choices. You apply for specific rooms rather than the building as a whole (so probably decide on which building you want a bit before applying for the room). As soon as the rooms are released apply as fast as you can because they go very quickly. I got my third choice because my first two were already taken, and this was all within the first minute of the rooms being released, so you definitely need to be sitting at your computer and applying the minute they are released.

Money matters

Please detail your basic costs, e.g. accommodation, flights, visa, food, insurance

Accommodation: €4,500 in total (approximate)

- €400 for January
- €650 February – July
- €230 August

You have to pay from the end of January until part way through August, even if you aren't staying that whole time. It is possible to sublet your room if you leave early, but DUWO has some conditions for this that you can read once you get your contract. Not all rooms in Hugo are the same price, but €650 a month is the standard price for most rooms I think.

Insurance: €378

Winter O Week Ticket: €64

Food: I have no idea how much I spent on food but I would say that buying food here is a bit cheaper, apart from meat which is more expensive and eating out which is definitely more expensive.

What means did you use to access your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, Cash passport, foreign bank account, etc.)

I used a Wise card and this was really easy and it didn't have many fees. It also works for the public transport. I didn't get a Dutch bank account because I didn't need it for anything.

Visas & Insurance

Did you have to apply for a visa? What was the process?

I didn't need a visa.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

It wasn't mandatory but I got the insurance recommended by Leiden University (AON International Student Insurance).

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organised activities were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

I would definitely recommend taking part in O Week because this makes it easy to meet other exchange students doing the same course as you, since you're split into groups based on your course.

ESN (Erasmus Student Network) runs events, parties and trips for exchange students, so those could be good to go to. There are also other clubs that you can learn about/join during O Week.

What was the university/ city like?

Leiden University is quite highly regarded for law so it was cool to be able to do some law papers there. Since it's so highly regarded I thought it would be a bit harder but I found it reasonably easy which is good. Most of the university buildings are quite nice, especially the law library. The uni buildings are not all located in the same place like most buildings are at Otago, so you might have to bike between buildings in between classes, but there is 15 minutes in between each class so you should be able to get to your next class on time (if they're both in Leiden) as long as you bike.

Leiden is a really nice city, similar in size to Dunedin and also with lots of students. There are a lot of canals and the classic Dutch houses and it looks like a smaller version of the touristy part of Amsterdam but with a lot less tourists. It's a pretty lively city and I had a lot of fun living there. It's also only about half an hour away from Amsterdam by train so if you do want to go to Amsterdam it's pretty easy.

Any recommendations for things to do, places to visit, places to eat etc.?

If you're coming to Leiden in semester 1 definitely get involved in King's Day (which is at the end of April) and King's Night (the night before King's Day). Everyone dresses in orange and the city puts on events and it's a lot of fun. We stayed in Leiden for King's Night (there was a concert) and then went to Amsterdam for King's Day which was crazy because it was packed with people dressed in orange all along the streets and in boats on the canals, and there's a lot of music playing.

If you're here in semester 1 you should also go to Keukenhof which is a giant garden open in spring with lots of tulips everywhere.

There is a market on in town every Wednesday and Saturday (where you can get really good stroopwafels), and it's right on the canal which is nice.

Any tips for future students?

Definitely get a bike because you'll end up biking most places. The two main bike rental places are EasyFiets and Swapfiets. I got mine from EasyFiets and if you ever have a problem with your bike they'll fix it for free/give you a different one.

If you're coming in semester 1 it will still be quite cold when you arrive (a bit colder than winter in Dunedin but you won't be in a single glazed flat so it's not too bad). I would recommend bringing thermals to wear for the first month or so. It gets really nice in spring because the city puts up flower boxes everywhere and you can watch the boats go past on the canal while sitting in the sun.

Overall Experience

Please write one paragraph (or more) about your exchange experience. Please include some photos!

I had a great time on my exchange in Leiden and I would really recommend it. I was able to travel a lot during the semester and went to Belgium, Germany, Czechia, France, Switzerland and Iceland. Pretty much everyone in the Netherlands can speak English so you won't have any trouble communicating with people and you'll meet lots of people from all over the world who are also in Leiden on exchange.



Some canals around Leiden



King's Day in Amsterdam

Dinant (Belgium)



Snowmobiling in Iceland

Lauterbrunnen (Switzerland)

The Swiss Alps



Easter markets in Prague



Paris