



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of Amsterdam (UvA)
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 2, 2022
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Laws
Major(s)	Philosophy, Politics and Economics

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
Behavioural Economics	English	ECON 318
Environmental Economics	English	ECON 300
Money and Banking	English	ECON 300
Green Economy and Society	English	POLS 300
Markets and Values	English	POLS 300

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

Any comments about these papers?

These papers (courses) were taken over 1 semester that was broken into three 'blocks' of either 8 weeks or 4 weeks – I took 5 courses over the first two 8 week blocks.

Due to the semester there being broken up, there are far more courses to choose from and you can take more courses over the same period of time which is great for exploring different interests. The course as this University involved a lot of critique of academic ideas as opposed to just learning them.

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

The courses were very intensive, both with regards to teaching time and work expectations. The work roughly equated to a full Otago semester but over a shorter time (8 weeks), with midterms in week 4 and exams at week 8 of each block. As such, the workload was far higher than at Otago, with

significantly more independent learning and research required. Readings were also typically necessary just to pass course – something which is not typical at Otago from my experience.

This is in part due to UvA being a 'research' University – one that focusses on academia and research output as opposed to practical skills which are typically the focus at Hogeschools' (Universities of Applied Science) in the Netherlands.

Lectures were normally 2 hours long (minimum) and I would have 4 hours of lectures and 2 hours of tutorials per week on average. Presentations and group work was also very common and in 80% of the courses I took they involved multiple individual or group presentations and projects. I particularly enjoyed this aspect of the University as students at UvA tended to be very academically interested, something which provided many opportunities to learn from those from different countries and learning backgrounds.

Teachers at UvA were typically less interactive than ones at Otago, and placed a lot more responsibility and accountability onto the students for their learning and knowledge of key dates etc. As such, getting face time or longer questions answered was not always that easy.

Once I got over the initial shock of the heavy workload and got adjusted to the busy schedule, I thoroughly enjoyed the wide variety of courses and different assessment styles. The opportunity to take many courses was also really cool as I could cover many interests in a short period.

Accommodation

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

Student Housing – Lieven de Key

As there is a housing crisis in Amsterdam, I was fortunate to be allocated a room in student housing (Lieven de Key) in Diemen – a small town just outside of Amsterdam. It was not the typical Amsterdam canal facing room I expected but was a short 25 minute bicycle ride to University and within close access to the CBD, either via bike or train. The accommodation was a flat style setting within a big building block. I had my own bathroom and shared a kitchen with 6 others.

Cons was that I couldn't pick my room, nor the location, but given the circumstances, I had no choice. Once I accepted that I can still have a good time and embrace Amsterdam while not living in the heart of it, I had a great time and made many friends from different places around Europe.

Money matters

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

- Flights - \$1400 (in July)
- Accommodation – \$900 per month (this will likely increase with the energy crisis etc.)
- Visa/Student Residence - \$150
- Food – \$150 per week minimum (groceries) → eating out is also very expensive
- Insurance - \$1100 NZD for July-February

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

Wise Card (TransferWise) is essential when travelling and before you are able to setup a foreign bank account – I was able to setup a Dutch bank account. It allows you to top it up with a currency

and then exchange it into foreign ones at a far more attractive rate than using a NZ bank. It also was far less expensive to transfer NZD into it and then forward it onto my Dutch bank account as opposed to a bank transfer from my NZ bank account to my Dutch one.

Once I had my residence approved and was assigned a BSN number, I was able to setup a Dutch bank account which I used when I was in Amsterdam.

Visas & Insurance

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

I had to apply for a student residence but it was very easy as the University mostly handles it. I had to be accepted at the UvA and then provide proof of funds (roughly \$10,000 NZD) to show I could support myself in the Netherlands.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Yes.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

The Erasmus (ESN) intro week was a great week long social week before I started the semester. Through this, I met heaps of other exchange students. Erasmus also provided WhatsApp groups and other activities throughout the semester which I would advise getting involved in. As there are so many internationals at UvA, it is very easy to meet people and everyone is keen to make new friends and do things!

The University also had sports teams and other clubs like at Otago which were easy to register for and get involved in.

What was the university/ city like?

The University of Amsterdam was very modern and had the majority of its campus in the centre of Amsterdam. As it is a university of over 40,000 students, it was extremely diverse and was refreshing to hear so many different accents and languages in every class. The campus was pretty easy to navigate (all within biking distance) and was big enough that I kept finding cool new places every other week.

Amsterdam was a super cool city and very accessible. It has a really good public transport system and it can be crossed in 40 minutes on a bike. It's an extremely 'international' city which meant that both within the city and the university, it was extremely diverse. As such, English is the default language spoken in the city which is really helpful – unless you are Dutch (who all speak perfect English). There's heaps to do in Amsterdam – both during the day and at night (especially). As its

almost in the centre of Europe and has one of the busiest airports in Europe, the rest of Europe is very close and within a cheap flight or train ride.

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

As Amsterdam is so international, there's no shortage of really good restaurants within the city, which I'd recommend indulging in. As cliché as it is, the nightclubs in Amsterdam are all next level, so whether you are into partying or not, it is certainly an experience worth having at least once. Also, as Amsterdam is a hub in Europe, there are world class gigs and events on almost every week, so the odds are one of your favourite performers will have a show in Amsterdam at some point when you're there. Swimming at the Marineterrein in Amsterdam is really cool in summer and then in winter, ice skating at Rembrandtplein or Museumplein, or the canals if it gets cold enough is worth doing.

During the build-up to Christmas the city gets super beautiful and I would highly recommend sticking around to see that – and head to Germany to see some Christmas markets.

For the true Dutch experience I would recommend getting out of Amsterdam and heading to Utrecht or one of the other smaller towns in the Netherlands and spending a weekend – preferably with a Dutch person if you can befriend one early on.

Any tips for future students?

Plan well and plan your courses out well. Courses are competitive to get into at UvA so it is important to pick them carefully before you head over - internally assessed ones if you want to travel more.

Finances are also very important both when in Europe and Amsterdam and I'd recommend coming over with 50% more than you think you need so that you can do everything you want and travel with friends when you're over there.

Study won't be easy but when you get used to it, it's good fun and you meet heaps of likeminded people and learn lots! Get involved in everything you can and talk to everyone you can as most people over there are internationals and are super welcoming and looking to make friends (especially with a Kiwi).

Overall Experience

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

Despite war in Ukraine, an energy crisis, and an economic crisis, I had an amazing and unforgettable exchange semester in Amsterdam. Combined with the 6 weeks of travel I did prior to starting the semester (which I'd recommend), I had an invaluable experience that I think everyone who has the opportunity should do! I have made lifelong friends, broadened my horizons, and had many experiences that I think will be far harder to recreate once you have left university. Make the most of your time in Europe and travel around and don't take university too seriously – if you work hard you'll be fine! I'd thoroughly recommend exchange to anyone who can do it – you won't regret it!

