

**Erasmus University, Rotterdam School of Management
2012 Semester 1
Masters of Business Administration**

General Comments:

Overall, my experience as a masters' exchange student at Rotterdam School of Management was immensely positive. I guess in retrospect I didn't really know what to expect, but when I arrived I discovered a tremendously diverse group of students with different commercial, academic, and professional experiences. One of things I noticed early on was that I was only one of a handful of MBA students, the rest of the group being general masters level students across a wide array of disciplines. Typically, under the European model, whereby a bachelor's degree is conferred after only three years, students round out their undergraduate experience by enrolling in a masters program straight away. As such, the average age of the group was probably 23.5 years or something close by anyway. As MBA students typically have something in the neighborhood of 5 years professional experience in between the completion of the bachelors' degree and commencing the MBA, immediately it was clear that I was one of the older students in the exchange group, and in the classes in which I was enrolled. At first this was challenging, but as my attitude adapted to the European experience, the perceived age gap narrowed considerably.

Academics:

I found the quality of the instruction and the deep offering of masters' level courses unrivaled. The semesters at RSM are each divided into two blocks. During my first block, I took 20 ECTS worth of courses, one being a course on Advanced Valuation and Corporate Finance. This course was extremely valuable, challenging, and ultimately rewarding as I represented Otago well, scoring in the top 1% for the final exam, and the top 5% for the overall mark, something that I am very proud of given the high caliber of students sitting for the course. The other course was called Banking and Financial Intermediation, which was primarily a quantitative risk management course that I found incredibly challenging and well instructed, covering material that was not even addressed at Otago.

During the second block of my exchange, I took one course worth 10 ECTS loosely titled Managerial and Group Decision-making, which had a heavy component based on negotiation theory. While ideally I would have wanted to sit for another finance and investments course, this course was also interesting and challenging, involving considerable group work, justifiable considering the course's nature. There was some overlap with a few of my Otago MBA courses, like game theory and few human resource management concepts, but the material was largely new to me and enthusiastically presented by the instructor.

By way of comparing RSM to the University of Otago, it is no wonder that there are few masters' exchange students from RSM choosing to study at Otago. This is due in large part to the fact that on a relative basis, Otago doesn't have nearly the number

and variety of challenging postgraduate circulae, or at least that are available or even marketed to the MBA students. This was my primary driver behind going abroad in the first place; to have access to specialized, sophisticated masters' level courses in finance. Otago by comparison is wanting in this area.

Other Comments:

I would most certainly recommend an exchange at RSM to other Otago students, but do so with a few words of caution. As an American who has had considerable contact with European culture over the years, I found the cultural shock of the Netherlands to be minimal. However, I know that wasn't the case for other students from hailing from other places, mostly the developing world. The Dutch language to the unaccustomed Anglophone is strange and difficult to comprehend. While many people speak English, they often do so in Rotterdam with a certain reluctance not exhibited in say Amsterdam, Antwerp or other Dutch/Flemish cities.

Another word of wisdom for students considering RSM would be to sort out accommodations prior to arriving. My ultimate recommendation would be to find a sublet from an Erasmus student traveling abroad during the same time period. This is often less expensive and of higher quality than arranging 5 to 6 month accommodations from a short stay provider upon arriving.

From a social perspective, I would say older MBA students (>35 yrs) would not be totally comfortable given the younger average age of other exchange participants. The social dynamic is active, lively, and requires a bona fide commitment in order to forge quality and lasting relationships. This also resonates within the classroom as the average age of most RSM masters students also reflects the exchange student demographic. In this regard, I am happy that I was able to balance academic performance, an active social life, and ample opportunities to travel throughout Europe.