

2012-2013

University Attended- VU university, Amsterdam

FEEDBACK 1

INDUCTION/ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

An organisation called ESN arranged travel from the airport to the campus accommodation, and assisted with administration and invited banks/phone companies etc to campus to set up necessary accounts. My faculty invited students to a tour of the university as well as a brief introduction to the university by some faculty members.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

The courses are taught in 6 periods across the academic year, which is very fast paced in comparison to the English system. It is advised to take on around 2/3 classes per period and exams are about every 2 months and one week of lectures may cover 4+ topics for one module. The hardest thing to adapt to was the higher pass rate at the VU, since a 5.5 is a pass however this does not equate to 55%, and often requires around 65% (sometimes 70%!) in the exam to actually attain a 5.5. Every exam that I sat was multiple choice, which required knowing the whole syllabus for very specific questions instead of being able to focus on a few topics and writing about them in essay form. Furthermore, coursework marks cannot bring your final grade up unless you attain a 5.5 in the exam, leaving little room for flexibility based on your learning style. On a lighter note, the standard of teaching was good and access to VUNet and the Blackboard system was fine, with course material regularly uploaded and exam keys are posted promptly after the exam so you can have a rough idea of your grade as well.

MBS INTERNATIONAL TEAM

Sufficient level of support and good contact.

MBS SECOND YEAR MEETINGS

Maybe more information about the methods of assessment about the particular university and the grading system.

HOST INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

The VU international office (Monique!) was very helpful with any queries I had, and always responded promptly to my emails/assisted with any issues.

INSURANCE, HEALTH COVER

I didn't require any compulsory health insurance for my stay in Amsterdam.

INFORMATION ON ANY ADDITIONAL COSTS

There were no additional fees from the university.

ACCOMMODATION

My accommodation was arranged through a company called DUWO who organise the short stay housing. They offer accommodation on a campus called Uilenstede, which is conveniently located about 15 minutes drive from the airport (30 mins on public transport), 20 minutes from the centre (30 minute cycle) and 5 minutes from university. Uilenstede is where 90% of exchange students live, the Green Tower especially, and offers a few different facilities. I paid 400 euros per month, which included a room with my own bathroom and shared kitchen facilities with 13 other people. My room contained its own fridge and a balcony, and the kitchen had a washer/dryer and plenty more fridge/freezer space. The contract requires that you have to pay for a full 12 months which would be from August to the following August, as well as administration fees of £150 and another £400 to DUWO (for god knows what?!) and a deposit of around £600/700.

DESTINATION INFORMATION AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Getting a bike is essential as the metro/tram can prove costly since there isn't a yearly/student discount pass available. A Dutch bank account is necessary since it is required for most things e.g. phone contract or paying in most stores. It's a good idea to become part of ESN, it's only about 10 euros but they put on a load of activities and trips and it's a good way to get integrated with other students!

The social life is great in Amsterdam, albeit a bit expensive. The main clubs are situated near Rembrandtplein and Leidseplein, try to avoid the temptation to cycle back from a night out as 9/10 people fall off and it is pretty dangerous!

DESCRIBE IN ONE SENTENCE YOUR YEAR ABROAD

Insightful, adventurous and challenging but overall - amazing!

FEEDBACK 2

INDUCTION/ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

Arriving in Amsterdam, moving into student halls and getting know the city wasn't challenging and living in a dorm with international students made making friends and meeting people very easy.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

To start off with, the academic system in Amsterdam is significantly different. The academic year consists of 6 periods, 4 with a duration of 2 months and 2 with a duration of 1 month. Further, the examination style is mostly multiple choice questions with the rare occasion of essay answering.

I experienced no difficulties in my first 3 periods, however I did notice significant lack of teacher support in the coming periods. This was most evident in the course "public relations and reputation management" in the faculty of social sciences. During a weeklong vacation back home, in Sri Lanka, I got quite ill and was unable to board the flight- causing me to miss the first week of university. Following my return I was still unwell and was unable to attend a few classes. Upon informing my lecturer about this, I was told that missing class resulted in myself not being part of a group to complete the assignment. I found this highly unfair and resulted in having to achieve higher marks to pass the course. Further I find that examiners and lecturers don't always cater to the English speakers with the reading out of exam instructions in Dutch and make important announcements in Dutch. I have learned substantially in my year abroad and the few bad experiences do not make me regret my decision coming here, however I do believe that entrance to VU university should require an average of at least 55 as that is the pass grade in all the courses I've taken here.

MBS INTERNATIONAL TEAM

The MBS international team has been extremely helpful with everything I've needed with prompt and helpful responses.

MBS SECOND YEAR MEETINGS

The second year meetings have been greatly helpful with providing guidance to which accommodation, courses and insight in to activities that must be experienced in Amsterdam.

HOST INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

The VU university International office has been helpful in every request I've had, especially with the numerous course changes that were carried out by myself.

INSURANCE, HEALTH COVER

I purchased a student insurance health cover by AoN insurance, however I haven't had the need to use it so far.

INFORMATION ON ANY ADDITIONAL COSTS

There has been a cost of 10euros for taking a 10% online "EIS simulation" game for Social Network Analysis.

ACCOMMODATION

For anyone moving to Amsterdam I highly recommend Uilenstede green tower. It's been an amazing experience with all the international students with near proximity to shops, university and a gym located on campus.

DESTINATION INFORMATION AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Transport; as Amstelveen is slightly out of the centre a bike ride of 30 minutes or a tram/metro ride of the same duration is required. An OV chipcard must be purchased which costs 7euros and the additional top up for travel . I have found transport to be convenient with the service running till 00:30 and a nightbus every half hour following that.

Travel; Located in the centre of Europe I found travelling extremely convenient. I've planned to do a European trip with the Inter-rail pass in the following month which I believe will be money well spent.

Social life; Amsterdam has a booming social life with nightlife catering to all different tastes with bars, clubs and coffee shops located all over.

Integration with local students; even though I have made a few Dutch friends I thought integration with local students was a difficult task significantly due to the language barrier.

DESCRIBE IN ONE SENTENCE YOUR YEAR ABROAD

The best year of my life