

## **ERASMUS Exchange Report**

### **Choosing Amsterdam**

I decided to go abroad because I wanted to deepen my knowledge in the field of Systems Biology. During the preparatory internet research I discovered that Amsterdam has plenty opportunities to do internships and also offers a MSc program “Systems Biology and Bioinformatics”. During a talk with my student coordinator I came to know that my university has an ERASMUS exchange program with the VU Amsterdam and that there are still places free for which I then applied. I considered this to be the perfect opportunity for me since an exchange would enable me to take some basic courses in systems biology and to do an internship in one of the research groups.

### **Before my arrival**

I had to fill out the regular ERASMUS forms. In addition to that, the international student secretary from the host university contacted me and helped me to arrange everything so that in the end I had a very easy start upon my arrival. Finding accommodation was not a problem at all since the university has contracts with housing companies. I have chosen to stay at “Uilenstede” with the DUWO housing company. To arrange everything it is necessary to pay “accommodation finding fees” of around 200 Euro. The coordinator also helped me with enrolling to the courses I have chosen. The coordinator of the MSc program helped me to find the right courses. During my communication with the host university I was provided with links and PDFs informing me about important facts (How to find a doctor, bank accounts, registration with the municipality, etc. ). The communication and service before my arrival was friendly, competent and very helpful.

### **Upon my arrival**

During my communication with the host university I was advised to arrive on one of the arrival days at the end of August. Choosing to come on one of those days had numerous advantages: The sport center was converted to a hall with several stations and each station handles one of the first important things to do: registration, getting an bank account, getting internet access, registering with the ESN (free prepaid card inclusive!), getting a bike (one of the most important items to survive in Amsterdam!). Therefore I was able to get everything done on my first day of arrival. Moreover I got to know about the International student days which were an excellent opportunity to get to know other students and to get a first impression of the city. Overall, I can say that the support and mentoring during those first days is excellent since everything is made really easy and you immediately get to know a lot of people who are willing to help you with whatever problem you have.

### **University Life**

I have enrolled in two introductory courses in Systems Biology and Bioinformatics. The teachers were very motivated and did not miss any chance to make lectures and seminars as entertaining as possible (including lectures in the Zoo of Amsterdam!). However, the general level of classes was low due to the unrestricted acceptance of applicants. As far as I know this will be changed for the next round of applications so I am confident that the overall level of classes (especially mathematics was rather disastrous) will be raised. Completing courses includes many assignments which can be done in groups or alone. In general one gets no feedback on the work submitted. Part of my course was a group project which was rather problematic due to the very different educational background and level of my group members. Here also, the grade was the only feedback we were given.

The courses were documented on the “blackboard” for which I was given my password before my arrival. This site can be considered as personal study board where everything concerning the

courses can be found. The University has a library which I never used and provides several facilities (printing, cafeteria, etc). Here you have to pay attention that in Netherlands people use the “pin” system and if you do not have a Dutch bank account it is not possible to print documents from the university’s printers.

During my stay I encountered that the student secretary is not able to help for every problem. I did not get a student ID or proof of registration although I repeatedly mentioned the problem to the responsible secretary. Obviously nobody felt responsible for it and after I had some unnecessary arguments I at least received a proof of registration. I don’t know whether the problem was miscommunication between the different offices or just lack of interest in solving the problem, but I was very disappointed how difficult they made it for me to get this proof, especially because I was forwarded several times between the university’s student desk and my faculty’s secretary.

### **Examinations**

The grading of the courses was either based on the practical work, exams or seminar contribution. The level of each examination varies but they make it not too hard to pass.

### **Sports and other activities**

The university offers a membership in the sports center and as a ESN member you get a lot of information about city trips and other activities. I here want to stress that the ESN does a really good job in organizing events to ensure that the cultural aspect is not neglected.

### **Conclusion**

My stay in Amsterdam and the organizational effort was facilitated by the excellent support of the international student organizations. I did not write anything about the city of Amsterdam because I assume that everyone can imagine how beautiful and entertaining it is. Staying at “Uilenstede” made it possible to get to know many internationals from every country one could think of. I was able to deepen my knowledge in the field I was interested in and on top of that I made many valuable experiences with different cultures and people.