

Experience report study abroad stay SoSe24

Student Name: Rattanaorn Boonchumanee.

Sending University: University of Oldenburg.

Receiving University: Hanze University of Applied Sciences, Groningen, Netherlands.

Planning and Organization:

My journey towards broadening my career in sustainable fuel systems began with the meticulous preparation of my Learning Agreement and application for Erasmus funding for my study abroad program. Although I aimed to secure accommodation in Groningen a month before my departure from the University of Oldenburg, I quickly realized that this was insufficient due to the high demand and cost of rooms caused by the influx of international students. Therefore, I highly recommend future students start their accommodation search even earlier to secure better and more affordable options.

Application Process:

The application process was thorough and involved submitting my Learning Agreement, academic transcripts, and proof of Erasmus funding. The international offices at both universities provided invaluable assistance, streamlining the process and ensuring that all required documents were submitted correctly and on time. Additionally, transitioning from Germany required arranging a new residence permit in the Netherlands. This involved deregistering from the local authorities in Germany and registering in the Netherlands, a process made smoother with the help of the international offices.

Travel and Arrival:

Given that Oldenburg is approximately 150 km from Groningen, I utilized my semester ticket, which covered the route and incurred no extra fees. My journey involved taking a train to Leer station and then a bus to Groningen Hoofdstation. I relied heavily on the Fahrplaner app for navigating travel within Germany and the NS Train app for travel within the Netherlands. These applications were invaluable for managing train and bus schedules, ensuring that my travel plans were executed smoothly. Upon arrival in Groningen, I used public transport to reach my accommodation. The detailed travel plans I had made using the apps helped reduce the stress of relocating to a new city.

Accommodation:

Finding accommodation in Groningen was a significant challenge due to the high demand and cost. I frequently checked the university's website for availability and utilized Facebook groups for international students, always exercising caution to avoid scams by checking rooms in person before making any payments. The accommodation I secured was basic but adequate, providing the necessary amenities for a conducive study environment and integration with other students. The living arrangements facilitated a good atmosphere for both academic pursuits and social interactions, enhancing my overall experience.

Studying at the Host University:

The semester at Hanze University was exceptionally well-organized, featuring a modern campus, dedicated teaching staff, and state-of-the-art laboratories. The curriculum emphasized practical assignments over traditional lectures, which enhanced my comprehension and provided ample time to explore practical solutions. I delved into various subjects including supply chain management, fermentation and digestion, combustion, liquefaction, and torrefaction. Practical experience with chemical plant modeling and life cycle assessments (LCAs) offered valuable insights into transitioning to renewable energy sources.

The instructors were professional and approachable, providing flexibility with deadlines and promptly addressing any doubts. This support was crucial for managing the workload and grasping complex concepts. The credit transfer process was straightforward due to clear agreements between the universities, ensuring that the selected courses met the criteria of the University of Oldenburg and facilitating smooth credit recognition.

Everyday Life and Leisure Time:

My daily life involved attending university and spending time with friends. I typically packed my food from home as the canteen was not commonly used by locals. Groningen, known for its bicycle-friendly culture, allowed me to enjoy cycling around the city and exploring its parks. The city offers numerous bars and cafes, providing opportunities to learn about Dutch culture through music, food, and conversation. Despite not being particularly outgoing, I appreciated the friendliness and helpfulness of the people.

General Experience and Conclusion:

My exchange at Hanze University was transformative, significantly broadening my career prospects in sustainable fuel systems. The academic environment and support were exceptional, though the workload was occasionally intense. Balancing significant responsibilities such as seeking a thesis topic and managing visa extensions was challenging. Redistributing the workload or extending assignment deadlines would enhance the academic experience, allowing better time management and deeper engagement with studies.

General Experience and Tips:

The exchange program at Hanze University of Applied Sciences in Groningen offers a unique opportunity to expand career prospects in sustainable fuel systems. The experience is characterized by high-quality education combined with practical skills development in a supportive environment. One of the key aspects of studying at Hanze UAS is the focus on assignments rather than traditional exams. This approach requires thorough preparation and effective time management skills, as students need to dedicate significant time to researching and completing these assignments, which often provide a more practical and in-depth understanding of the subject matter.

Groningen, known for its bicycle-friendly culture, offers an excellent opportunity to experience Dutch city life. However, securing your bicycle properly is crucial to prevent theft, which is unfortunately common in many Dutch cities. Investing in a good quality lock and always securing your bike to a fixed object can help protect your primary mode of transportation.

The Erasmus+ funding program is a valuable resource for exchange students, adequately covering living costs in Groningen. This financial support allows students to focus on their studies and enjoy their time abroad without excessive financial stress. It's advisable to budget wisely and take advantage of student discounts available throughout the city.

To make the most of your exchange experience, it is recommended to start preparations early, especially when it comes to finding accommodation. The housing market in Groningen can be competitive, particularly at the start of the academic year. Beginning your search well in advance can help secure more desirable and affordable housing options.

Finally, don't forget to take advantage of Groningen's friendly atmosphere and rich cultural offerings. The city boasts numerous parks, cafes, and cultural events that provide excellent opportunities to immerse yourself in Dutch culture and connect with both local and international students. Balancing academic commitments with exploration of the city and its surroundings will contribute to a well-rounded and enriching exchange experience.