Experience report of my Erasmus exchange semester in Groningen, Netherlands
(Winter Semester 2021/22)
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Preparation & application process
During my Bachelor's I did my semester abroad at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, which is a city located in the Northern Netherlands. I had two options either to go to the University of Hull in the UK or to the RUG (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen/University of Groningen) in the Netherlands. Firstly, I was interested in going to the University of Hull and then there were many factors for which I chose RUG. Mainly my friend who was also planning to do a Semester abroad at RUG, where we knew each other since the first semester from the home University of Oldenburg. Then I started to apply to the RUG semester abroad as they also had similar courses that were offered in the 5th semester at the home University in the Engineering Physics program. So that I could easily transfer the credit points for those courses and thus don’t have to take those courses again at the home university. The application process was quite easy and everything was guided by the International office of the University of Oldenburg (goingabroad@uol.de/https://uol.de/wege-ins-ausland). Then I contacted the course coordinator who is responsible for our Engineering physics program in doing a semester abroad (petra.gross@uni-oldenburg.de/m.reck@uni-oldenburg.de) to get prepared with my Learning Agreement. Initially, I wasn’t planning to do a semester abroad as there were a couple of difficulties like moving out from Oldenburg and finding accommodation in the new city. Also for non-European students, we had to register at the city registration office and we have to get a residence permit for the duration of our stay semester abroad. But it was totally worth doing an Erasmus exchange semester abroad as especially we get to know about different cultures, meet new people, and exchange ideas with other students.

The application to the host university
Firstly, I submitted the exchange semester abroad application form to the International office of the University of Oldenburg. Then, there is the Learning agreement, we have to choose which course we are going to take during the semester abroad, although this shouldn’t be exactly the same. The courses can be changed during the mobility semester abroad period. Then the mobility online account will be created by the University of Groningen. We have to submit this exchange application to the host university. Then the documents, Transcripts of records, CV, motivational letter, and the recommendation letter should be submitted. Then after a few days, I got the acceptance
letter from the University of Groningen, which even made me more motivated on doing the semester abroad.

**Housing - Accommodation**
Finding accommodation in Groningen can be really hard. So it's better to apply early as possible as there are thousands of students applying before the semester starts. So please never underestimate the challenge of finding accommodation as it is quite a long and stressful process. Therefore I would strongly recommend to actively look for a room from April/ May onwards if you’re starting your studies in September. So I’ll mention some important links and information to find a room in Groningen. The best option is to find a room through Facebook groups (Groningen rooms, Free Housing Announcement in Groningen, Find room/roommate in Groningen, Rooms for rent in Groningen, etc..) then the other option is to register at SSH Groningen (https://www.sshxl.nl/en/shortstay/university-of-groningen) there is a particular application time period which will be informed per Mail about the application opening time and as soon as the application opens within few hours most of the rooms will be reserved. So it’s better to be on time to book a room. But one disadvantage of the SSH rooms are that the kitchen and washrooms are shared with 10 or more people although you will have your own single room. Then there is other private website like Kramenet (https://kamernet.nl/en/for-rent/room-groningen)or room.nl (https://www.room.nl/my-room/my-room). Then as the last option, there is some temporary place organized by the city government for a few months. Finally, the Budget hostels which sum up to be quite expensive if you live for a longer time period.

In my case, I was searching for rooms via Kramenet and room.nl as I missed the SSH application opening deadline, and when I saw the next day almost all the rooms were booked already by other students. As I couldn’t finally find a room before the beginning of the semester then as the last option I stayed in the Budget Hostel for a few days and then I found a room offer via a Facebook group, which I finally got settled after the first few stressful weeks. There were also some students who couldn’t find a room at all and they left the University as the last option which is quite sad to hear. So it’s always good to search actively as early as possible to find a room to have a smooth start to the semester abroad. Also, please be very careful when finding a room online, make sure not to pay any money before you visit the place in person. As there are lots of fraud and scams happening just like in most of the other countries. I personally went through atleast 10 to 15 scam emails. So always visit and read the contract properly and then pay the money. To read further about scamming: (https://www.athomeingroningen.com/housing-in-groningen/avoid-scamming/).

**Arrivals and first few weeks in Groningen**
The semester started in the first week of September but many students arrived a few days ahead to get to know about the new city and to get things settled. Initial orientation week took place a week before the semester started at the Martini Church in Groningen, the oldest church in Groningen. In which we could get all information about the university, housing and about living in Groningen. The first event took place virtually in which we get to know about the Campus and then soon after we all met other Erasmus exchange students at the
Campus Zernike (part of the University of Groningen where our study course Engineering and science takes place) and this was organized by the International office of the University of Groningen. Then the most interesting part of the semester abroad is the ESN events which are organized by the Erasmus Student Network (ESN). The first week was full of events organized by ESN like Music Bingo night, International dinner, comedy night, Dutch classes to learn some Basic Dutch language, and Movie night where we could meet other Erasmus exchange students from different countries. For these events, we have to buy a ticket which costs around 40 Euros but this is totally worth the money and where you can get to know other Erasmus students to hang out for the rest of the semester abroad and even after.

Traveling to Groningen isn’t that far from Oldenburg as the city Groningen is on the north border of the Netherlands and it only takes around 2.5 hours by train. The additional benefit for us is that even traveling to Groningen from Oldenburg is covered in our campus card so it’s for free.

Life in Groningen
Groningen has a lot to offer, from colorful art and music scenes to a unique student nightlife and the famous and long-known old canals. Groningen is also known as a party town as there are many world-class festivals where Artists from all over the world take part in such events. To stay fit and active during the semester abroad, joining Aclo is a must as there are around 50 sports clubs offering up to 100 disciplines, which only costs 60 euros for a year.

ACLO is the biggest student sports association in the Netherlands. The English language is widely spoken throughout the country and there won’t be any difficulties without knowing the Dutch language as most people understand and speak English in the Netherlands. But it’s always an added advantage to learn the language if you’re applying for any jobs. Personally, I didn’t learn the Dutch language as German is already a fourth language for me. But overall throughout the semester abroad, I didn’t face any difficulties due to language. As everyone from University staff to supermarket employees speaks in English.

How to Meet new people and do extracurricular activities
As already mentioned there is two orientation week, one is organized by the ESN and the other is the KEI-week, both events happen before the start of the semester. So everyone is new to the city and therefore it’s easy to meet new people and get to know each other. There are also lots of events organized by the ESN during the semester abroad like the International dinner, Bowling, Student nights in the city, and Excursions which happen once every month and they take to other cities in the Netherlands and even some time to other European countries.
Also, you can meet new students when doing extracurricular activities and by joining a variety of sports clubs. I personally met lots of students from the Athletic club (GSAV Vitalis) and in the horse riding classes organized by the GSPV Parafrid horse riding club.

**Studies at the host university - Courses, academic year - semester division**

The academic year at the University of Groningen consists of two semesters as in our home University of Oldenburg but then in the University of Groningen, they divide each semester into two blocks, each lasting for around 10 weeks. Then at the end of the block, it concludes with an exam period. So when I did a semester abroad just for one semester, they had two blocks. In which I had to focus on 2-3 courses for one block and then similarly again for the next block. I found it quite good to split the semester into two blocks as we can focus just on 2-3 modules intensively for around 2 to 2.5 months rather than study on 5-6 different courses for 5 months.

Courses were similar to the courses that are offered at the home university of the Bachelor's program in EP (Engineering physics). In my case, during the 5th semester, the host university also offered the same course, Material science, Control Engineering, Solid-state physics, and even specialization modules in Renewable energy thus it made it easy to transfer the credit points so that we shouldn’t have to take the modules again at the home university.

**Credit point system (ECTS) and the grading system in comparison with the German grading system.**

The University of Groningen also has the same ECTS credit system. Each module only consisted of 5 credit points whereas at our home university most of the modules were 6 credit point modules.

The Grading conversion from Dutch to German grades system, which is from 1-10 grade in Dutch with 5.5 as pass cut-off point. 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest. The German grading system is from 1 to 4 scale where 1 is considered the best grade and 4 as the worst and 5 is a fail.
Pictures

De Drie Gezusters Groningen - biggest pub in Europe

University of Groningen Library - with a Starbucks inside the library

Groninger Forum - which has a Public library, cinema and Groninger Museum inside it

Inside Groninger Forum - public library