Experience report University of Groningen (RUG) Netherlands fall 2022/23

Studiengang / study programme: M.Sc. Neurocognitive Psychology

Student: Bartels

Den folgenden Bericht schreibe ich auf englischer Sprache, da mein Studiengang komplett auf Englisch unterrichtet wird und er so allen Studierenden meines Studiengangs hilfreich sein kann.

The following report I write in English, as our study programme is taught in English and thus this report can be useful to any student in our programme.

Paperwork

As this was not my first student exchange and one of many experiences and projects abroad, the paperwork was not too complicated for me to complete. The paperwork also has gotten easier than some years ago, as most of it can be done online now and the kind exchange staff would even sometimes reply to e-mails on Sundays, due to the new home office culture. Of course, this is not to be expected as mails can also take days or weeks to be replied to at times of holidays. Thus, I recommend doing the paperwork as early as possible, you will save your future you quite some stress when having as much of it done as possible before arriving at your destination. The exchange office staff of the University of Groningen is generally very kind and helpful and replies within days to your e-mails. Meeting them in person is recommendable and very efficient for any more complicated issues, if you have the chance.

I am completing 2 exchange semesters, which had overlap in the end and the beginning of their semesters – the semester in Groningen was still ongoing in January while I already had to move to Oslo and start my lectures there. That is not very recommendable if you are not used to doing a lot of paperwork or generally feel like you don’t have a lot of resilience to stress and high workload. I did it anyways, and would probably not decide for such an overlap if I needed all of the credits in Groningen for my transcript of records. But as I have already completed most of my credits at the University of Oldenburg before going on exchange, I am more flexible to drop my expectations on the measures of academic performance.

Finding accommodation in Groningen

... is messy and stressful. It is quite intense work for most people to find a place to live. You can book a student room via the student residence SSH housing, but their places are quite limited, expensive and you seemingly have to get a contract for at least 6 months. If you decide for this option, make sure to be quick and work with the opening deadlines.

The other option is to find accommodation via facebook groups and websites like “kamernet.nl”. Most Dutch student houses do not accept international students, that’s somewhat a weird nationalistic culture. As an international non-female you probably have the lowest chances to find student housing. But don’t be discouraged, I posted a well defined profile of myself in around 10 facebook groups and someone found me and decided to invite me to live with them! Like this I was lucky to be spared of the long and stressful apartment hunting process.
Nevertheless, I went to one apartment viewing before, which was looking for specific people, and I almost got the room. The people living there offered me instead, if I don’t find anything until the semester starts, to stay in their attic for a month or two. That would have been a very tiny place, but at least a place to sleep. That’s the situation in Groningen – start searching for accommodation early and if it financially makes sense to you, renting a room through SSH housing is probably the most stress-free option. But remember to be quick for that option, don’t miss the exact time when the rental starts, it is first come first serve. I recommend not to cancel your contract in Oldenburg before you have a room in Groningen. Going back and forth could be a good option. And be aware of scams! There are many messages coming in via facebook, claiming to have a room for you. Make sure you don’t pay money to someone if you are not sure you will actually get accommodation from them.

**Life in Groningen**

This city is full of fantastic opportunities. There are lots of events, many kinds of events one can imagine. You will likely have little time to do all the things you would like to do. Better enjoy the workshop or opportunity you would like to join from early on in the semester, the semester passes more quickly than you would think. There are lots of bars and student clubs with free entrance in the city. Generally, students don’t get great discounts and many things are paid.

As I have been more in the non-alcohol culture, I highly recommend the community center Edanz. Sangha Café is a project hosted there, they have a mindful space where you can go and hangout almost every day of the week, have donation-based vegan food and lots of workshops around meditation, mindfulness, breathwork, ecstatic dance, etc. Here is the link: [https://sanghacafe.com/en/](https://sanghacafe.com/en/)

If you are interested in events around international student life, I recommend checking out ESN Groningen (Erasmus Student Network). They host events that can be sporty, drinky, linguistic, etc. Many different kinds of events! Often overcrowded, at least in the beginning of the semester. Still a great opportunity to meet a lot of students from different countries and study programmes. They also host a welcome week in the beginning of the semester, I recommend checking it out and buying your ticket rather sooner than later, as they did run out of tickets when I was there.

Some other useful links to WhatsApp groups that may be of interest for you:

Psypchedelic Society RUG (scientific events around the topic of psychedelic research, a.o.)
[https://chat.whatsapp.com/HJdAQW5sEQQCa5zpFg7DOPjE](https://chat.whatsapp.com/HJdAQW5sEQQCa5zpFg7DOPjE)

Mediflotion (workshops around meditation, mindfulness, etc.)
[https://chat.whatsapp.com/BSBFUImelTOM7hPxK8TSC](https://chat.whatsapp.com/BSBFUImelTOM7hPxK8TSC)

Sangha Café Community (previously described)
[https://chat.whatsapp.com/L7r4sisxYPyEqSSz0ULiHp](https://chat.whatsapp.com/L7r4sisxYPyEqSSz0ULiHp)

**Studies in Groningen**

The education system I would say is in general quite similar to that in Germany (if you know e.g. Southern European or Asian education systems). I will now describe my observed differences. The semester is split into 2 sub-semesters, called 1a and 1b, or 2a and 2b for the second semester. The first semester starts in September and the first exam period for semester 1a is in the beginning of
November. It is good to start studying early, as there is not much time between the lectures and the exams. What I found great about the contents to be studied for the exam is that we actually had to read a big selection of research papers. That is a skill I do not think to have acquired to a sufficient extent in our NCP program in Oldenburg, so it is a great complimentary program.

The difficulty of the exams varies. Generally, exam results are not as predictable as in Germany. You get scores from 1-10, with anything under 6 being a fail and 6-10 being a pass. High grades are rare and even if you think you performed well, you might not get the corresponding grade for it (e.g. a 7.5 for an exam that I “rocked”, while Dutch students assured me that it is a really good grade). In Germany I can usually predict quite well which grade I get for my performance, while it felt a bit more “random” and less transparent at the RUG. Some grades were also surprisingly good, after my expectations significantly lowered. Due to this perceived unpredictability, I would recommend not to focus too much on the grades, study well what you enjoy studying and don’t be too attached to the outcome in terms of grading.

The teaching in general was good. As anywhere, some lecturers really know what they are doing and deliver their contents and knowledge really well, while others make it feel a bit more cumbersome and as if teaching is not in favor of the students’ acquisition of skills and knowledge but more of a testing procedure of endurance. Worth mentioning here is that I generally have high expectations on teachings and how I invest my time, I am used to going to conferences and listening to the world’s top speakers in my fields of interest.

Generally I don’t want to bias people, as each and everyone of us has their own experience with different teaching styles, but one teacher and her course I would like to recommend, due to her excellence in teaching: Diana Rus and her course “Power & Leadership”

Wrap-up

I very much enjoyed the exchange semester, it gave me lots of new insights, it was great to have a look into another Northern European education system, a different European society and understanding bit by bit how it works, learning new academic contents with a different focus than my home university, getting more fluent in a language that is quite closely related to my mother tongue, unexpectedly making very deep new connections / friendships and overall just enjoying to be alive on this planet. What a fantastic journey, this human experience. I feel deep gratitude for anyone who is involved in this happening, and also for the network around the funds that gave me financial support. Also, I would like to express my gratitude for the ERASMUS social top-up – living with a chronic disease that our medical system has no solution for can be quite devastating. Financial support in this context was a bright light that supported me in my endeavors to continue on my path.

Thank you! ありがとうございました！感謝します！