

Semester Abroad

University College Maastricht

Report

Introduction

Last semester, I had the opportunity to follow courses at the University College Maastricht (UCM). This enabled me to strengthen my academic profile, already tailored towards globalization and international relations, in an academic establishment renowned for these scientific domains. In this report, I want to share the peripeties of this learning experience.

Context

My semester in UCM was made possible thanks to the newly introduced inter-UC exchange programme; an initiative organized by the University Colleges of the Netherlands to give an opportunity to students to experience an exchange within the country's borders . With that said, although it was the first time this was put into practice, this was by no means noticeable in the admission process and support system, which were both clear and reliable. Additionally, I think it is important to emphasize that the inter-UC initiative also aimed to provide an alternative for students who were unable or unwilling to travel internationally for various reasons. This was also the case for myself. More specifically, I initially applied, and got nominated for the Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), but this ultimately didn't happen due to Covid-related restrictions. Needless to say that I was (and am) especially grateful for this opportunity, as it enabled me to expand my horizons despite the global pandemic.

My experience

“So,, you went to a different University College. Wasn't it annoyingly similar to ATLAS-UCT? Do you think that it is really worth it to organize an exchange semester, if you're going to end up with people and courses similar to those from your home university?” You might be asking yourself those very legitimate questions. Admittedly, these popped up in my head occasionally. With that said, please allow me to share some distinctive characteristics that, in my opinion, still make it more than worth it to go to a sister-UC in the Netherlands.

As mentioned before, this semester enabled me to strongly solidify the theoretical side of my academic profile, which highly aligned with the courses provided at UCM in particular. Additionally, I was surrounded by students with similar interests in that regard, which made it possible to extend my education outside of the classrooms with my peers. I thus invite you to have a look at the domains for which the different UCs are renowned, and consider applying for one if it overlaps with your academic profile and interests.

A similar approach can be taken with regards to different educational approaches. The University of Maastricht, for example, is known for its Problem-Based Learning (PBL), which distinguishes itself by opting for quality instead of quantity of the learning material and depth of analysis by providing smaller groups of students and expecting a high degree of commitment and contribution from the students. I could really find myself in this method of education, which further motivated me to go there!

Finally, on a more personal level, I noticed that after 4 semesters of being part of ATLAS-UCT and the “Atlantis Bubble”, an increasingly larger part of me needed to enter a new environment. Particularly in the context of the Covid-crisis, which already made it more difficult to meet people from different studies and places. Even if it was only 200 km from the UT, UCM gave me an unseen opportunity to meet new people and have different experiences. Thus, regardless of where you decide to go, the mere fact that you move to a new environment will in itself be an enriching experience, albeit only on a personal level.

Some final remarks

Although I am grateful and overall happy with my exchange experience, I retrospectively believe that small preparatory decisions could have even further enhanced my semester in Maastricht. As I don't want you, my dear reader, to fall into the same foolishly simple mistakes I did, I want to briefly share some disclaimers with you.

1. Start looking for a room in time!

I naively started looking for a room only two month before the start of the semester. Hence, most of the student housing within a “reasonable” budget was already taken. Because of this, I was forced to commute from Brussels, my hometown, to Maastricht to attend my exclusively mandatory, in-person classes for the first six weeks. Besides being rather timeconsuming (+/- 30 hours per week), this particularly affected my social life and opportunities to meet new people and experience student life in Maastricht.

2. Contact people from your university/faculty/study before arriving.

We all know how difficult it can be to meet new people. Particularly if you're entering higher classes, with often more established relationships and friend groups. In this regard, I really invite you to already get in contact with people from your host university, faculty, or study. This can easily be done by joining facebook groups or other social media facilities. It is definitely a more optional thing, but I retrospectively think that this could've helped me enjoy the social aspect of my exchange even more.

These were the big lines of my exchange experience at UCM.