

Abedalhadi El Rabih

Erasmus-Coordinator: Dr. Ute Meyer

29. January 2019

Erasmus Report

Sharing the Experience of an Exchange Semester in Norway

Taking part in an Exchange Semester abroad, either Erasmus (within the EU) or outside EU, needs a major preparation which consume much time. So the best you can do is to start the preparation as soon as possible! I started the preparation almost one year before I went to Norway! First, any student should have an idea about the country he/she wants to spend his exchange semester time in. Second, which I think is the most important, what does the student want to study abroad? Are the courses he/she willing to study offered at the partner university of his home university? Are the courses offered abroad recognised at the home university? All these questions should be clearly clarified and discussed with the faculty exchange semester coordinator before going into any advanced steps. It is also important to note that not all partner universities in the aimed guest country offer the preferred courses of the student. For example, beside Norway I was also so interested into going to England, however the partner universities didn't offer Molecular Bioscience courses, as I am willing to have my profile modules in Molecular Biology in the fifth semester of my Bachelor studies. So Norway was definitely the best choice for me, as the guest university I went to offered a Molecular Biosciences semester exchange package.

After the right country and courses are chosen, we come here to some paper work. So mobility online is a great online website that goes with the student step by step informing about every paper that must be submitted and when, before the application can be processed! Some points must be taken into consideration before going on! The student must check if the bank account he/she has, works normally in the guest country and if there are taxes upon every payment once being in the guest country. Second, Abroad insurance! Once going out for a long stay like in this situation for example, then you need studying abroad insurance, which covers your health insurance plus extra services if needed during your whole stay in the guest country! A very important topic is that the student must check if his/her nationality

need a visa or other legal residence permit in the selected guest country! For example, as I have Lebanese passport, so I am not from the EU, I needed a residence permit in Norway if I am staying longer than three months there, although I have German residence permit. These informations should be checked with the respective embassy or general consulate of the selected guest country! Moreover, each guest country according to the EU regulations is classified into a category. This category gives an idea about the financial support that the student will get from the home university. Of course the higher the standards of living quality in a certain guest country, the higher will be the financial support. So everything is proportional! 70% of the financial support from the home university will be given after the grant agreement is signed and you are already present in the guest university. The rest 30% will be given after the confirmation of Erasmus study period is signed from the student and the Erasmus coordinator in the guest university and processed by the international office at the home university. Confirmation of Erasmus study period paper indicates when you were present at the guest institute and when was your last day of presence at the guest university! Of course everything being said covers the Erasmus regulations, so the EU exchange programs! Outside EU exchange programs may offer no financial support at ALL, and paper work will depend highly on YOU!

After the paper work is processed and the admission letter arrived from the guest university, the student should start as soon as possible searching for accommodation! Normally more information about the accommodation matter will be present in the admission letter. Once the room is reserved, which I advice to be near the university as you won't know the place at all once you arrive, you can then reserve a flight ticket. But please never forget to check the visa and residence permit topic before booking! The first week at the guest university will be an orientation week. During this week you will be guided in the university and all questions can be asked and answered directly, regarding courses, registration, student card etc... Of course the courses must be registered and you must be enrolled at the guest university **BEFORE** arriving to the guest university! So questions regarding that matter can be forwarded to your Erasmus - guest university coordinator. They are normally so kind, helpful, and open minded so don't worry about it! Very very important during the orientation week, and this is an essential advice and recommendation from me which will affect your whole stay abroad, make **FRIENDS!** With no friends you will not enjoy your stay abroad, I assure you! So make as much friends as possible and be enrolled in much activities offered as you can, as this is a great opportunity to exchange cultural experience and

mentality not only with local students but also international ones. For example, I went to Norway, so as expected I must have made many Norwegian friends, right? That's true, but adding to that I had a very close relationship and contact with several Japanese friends, as the program I had was an English language program degree, so there was many international students. And as a result, of course knowing the Japanese culture and mentality from before, however manifesting it through that exchange program, I may visit those Japanese friends, I met in Norway, in Japan! All I want to say is that exchange programs open for you many doors in life experience! However, making as much friends as possible and involving yourself in several cultural activities doesn't mean that you forget your studies! Remember your courses come **FIRST!** So if you felt that the activities and socialism is affecting your studies negatively, then reduce them definitely or don't take part at **ALL!** Remember, yes exchange semester is an amazing experience that you need to take advantage off, however it is a **TEMPORARY** stay! You will still continue your life normally when you come back, so the grades really matter if you want to recognise them when you come back and not loose a whole semester of your studies! So to take a complete advantage of the semester abroad, you must combine hard work with cultural activities **PROPORTIONALLY!**

Talking maybe more about the courses themselves, some points must be taken into consideration with full responsibility! As mentioned before, information regarding the courses and university registration will be stated in an E-mail from your guest University Erasmus coordinator. So please ask questions if something is not clear. Maybe I didn't mention this point before, you should choose the courses at the guest university by yourself! Once you chose them and discussed them with your home university Erasmus coordinator, then a paper called "Learning Agreement-Before the Mobility" will be filled with the name and code of the courses chosen, in which the paper will be signed by the student, home university Erasmus coordinator, as well as the guest university Erasmus coordinator. So your guest university coordinator will have already an idea about the courses you chose, and will link you directly to your courses. Now once there and you decided for a certain reason to change or exclude a specific course you chose, then you need to contact your guest Erasmus coordinator as soon as possible, to check if their is available places or if the materials of the course chosen is not limited to a specific number of students. Once you have the confirmation from your guest Erasmus coordinator, you contact directly your home Erasmus coordinator so you can change and upload the new paper "Learning agreement-During the Mobility"! Please note that if no courses are changed or any type of editing reached the courses chosen, this paper should not

be uploaded on the mobility online website! You will also receive a link from your guest Erasmus coordinator, which forwards you to the website where you can register your courses as well as your exams and then you will see the type of assessment and the date of exam for each course chosen! Regarding the language of instruction, if you don't speak the language of the country and the courses you're taking are in English, however still have difficulties in English language, normally the guest university offers a language support courses that helps you improve and enhance your skills. I definitely recommend it if you feel you had any difficulties understanding the teacher during the lectures! If you are going to the northern parts of Norway as I did, there is a seminar which gives some tips how to overcome darkness during winter and if there are any vitamins or fish oil you can take!

Regarding the accommodation! As I mentioned before, once you get the admission letter, more information about the accommodation application process will be stated. My recommendation would be definitely to take a room beside the university! Because as I said, you won't know the place at the first insight, so you need some time to get along the place and the environment. If you are going alone, and don't prefer to live with someone you don't know, then a private room with your own bathroom would be the best choice. Common kitchen is not actually a big deal, cooking is always more flexible and normally all international students present at your dormitory are so open minded and easy going, so don't worry about that issue! If you are going with a friend as I did, and you know this person really well, then you can book a house together with two separate bedrooms, however with a common kitchen and bathroom. It is completely upon your decision and flexibility! In reference to the price, as I said before every country is divided into a category regarding its living standards. As I was in Norway, the accommodation was around 500 €. However the financial support take the country's standard livings into consideration!

As I was in Norway, and especially in a city called Bodø, I have never worried about safety or security issues. It was so peaceful there and everyone was so nice and kind. You literally forget what's happening in the world! However of course, it is not the case in every country, it highly differs, so you need to collect some extra information regarding that topic before you go to your selected guest country! Transportation depends also on the city you are going to, either it is big or small, and what type of transportation is present! As Bodø is a city with relatively small population, busses were the only public transportation present. However, I used to go to the university walking as I used to live beside the university, and I used to buy a single ticket for the bus whenever I wanna go the city centre. However, if you live in the city

centre and will take the bus for example everyday to the university, then a monthly ticket for university students will be the best choice. Even when I arrived in August to Bodø, the bus was free for the university students during the orientation week and for around two weeks after the courses have started! So you must check the regulations once you are there! If you felt that the living standards are so high and you can't afford the living expenses, then a student job is always an option, in which some of the international students I knew in Norway worked in a pub beside the university. However, it is very important to balance between your daily life, work, and most essentially your **STUDIES!**

Once you have finished your semester abroad and are back in your home university, the first thing you should do is to recognise your grades you've gotten in your guest university, so that the credit points with their respective marks can be added to your Transcript of Records. This happens through the communication with your home Erasmus coordinator of your faculty, in which the coordinator converts the marks, you got to the respective courses you had in your guest university, to the German grading system. You take then the recognition certificate to the examination office so they can be successfully added to your Transcript of Records! Moreover, as you had the experience of a semester abroad, you can write an experience report as I am doing right now, in which you must go through several points that the international office will tell you about, describing your experience and the procedure you went through to have this opportunity, and at the end you will get three credit points as general studies!

Last but not least, I gave so many hints and tips for experiencing such an amazing opportunity and the procedure to achieve it! However, I'll talk now a little bit about my experience in Norway and what it offered me! Life is an adventure, full of ups and downs, but also full of **OPPORTUNITIES!** Chances in life don't come frequently, and the ones that you can get which open for you many doors for the future are **RARE!** That's why we, especially students, should take advantage of such opportunities whenever available. Beside what I learned from Norway, regarding life, nature, culture, and new characteristic personalities, I gained so many international friends. Life isn't about going a semester abroad and then come back and continue your life normally. **NO!** The next step in life should be the next challenge! For example, now as I have several Japanese friends, and I am willing to visit this amazing culture soon, I am planning to finish a degree or at least experience a semester exchange there! All I wanna say is that such opportunities play a major part in international success, they are like a key opening one door after another! Regarding Norway, I can definitely

recommend it, especially where I was in the arctic circle as you will experience a whole new concept of life in overcoming darkness through it's positive sides (like aurora: northern lights) and enjoying summer which is easy to accomplish in Norway with such a breathtaking natural views! I wish all students best of luck for their future plans, and please make the best of your semester abroad as you will live it only ONCE!