Exchange Report
The Hague University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands
European Studies program
January – May 2017
SFU major: International Studies

Preparation for exchange

While selecting a country for my exchange, I considered which countries were internationally significant, as my major at SFU is International Studies. I ended up choosing to study in the Netherlands, in The Hague more specifically, because of its truly “international” status, what with being the home of the International Court of Justice and various other international organisations. I also considered the ease of travel from my exchange country, as I also wanted to travel on weekends and holidays.

Before departing, we had to select our courses. This was a bit of a hassle, as on the university’s website it had said that registration opened for exchange students on September 1st, 2016. The date ended up changing with little notice to me, to the end of October. While planning courses, I looked at the exchange credit history at SFU, as well as courses that simply seemed interesting to me offered at The Hague University.

I had read previous exchange reports and questionnaires from SFU and what I had gathered in terms of packing was that winter in The Hague was cold and windy. I packed a heavy winter jacket as the wind chill was often horrible. It didn’t rain nearly as much as it does in Vancouver, but it definitely felt colder than home. I was able to fit everything in one large suitcase and a carry-on bag. Lots of layers are definitely needed for spring in The Hague, as the weather can change quickly. I didn’t bring bedding or towels, as they would have taken up too much space in my suitcase. I found cheap linens at Primark, though better quality ones could be bought at the department store, de Bijenkorf. In terms of school supplies, I brought pens and notebooks, though they could definitely be bought over there. In short, if one forgot to pack anything, it could easily be bought in The Hague.

Direct flights are available to Amsterdam from Vancouver, though they can be pricey. Look for flights well ahead of time, and arrive a week or so before orientation starts at the
university to get your bearings of the city and allow yourself time to adjust to the time change (the Netherlands is nine hours ahead of Vancouver). Transportation to The Hague from Amsterdam-Schiphol is quite easy. Trains run at least twice an hour through Den Haag Hollands Spoor, and it is advisable to purchase an OV-Chipcard, which is similar to a Compass Card --- simply tap it when entering and leaving transit. It can be refilled at a kiosk in any train station or most grocery stores. Most of these kiosks only accept credit card or coins. Dutch people mostly use a bank card to pay for things, though cash is always accepted. Credit cards (Visa and Mastercard) are accepted most places, expect in the main grocery store chain (Albert Heijn) wherein it only accepts Dutch cards. Cost of living was fairly similar to Vancouver, though keep the currency exchange rate (Canadian dollar to Euro) in mind. I chose to take over enough Euros to cover my first few weeks in the Netherlands, then used my debit card to withdraw money from a bank machine (just watch for the fees charged by your bank).

**During exchange**

Upon arrival in the Netherlands, I knew vaguely how the train system worked, having visited in 2016. I was also bracing myself for the minimal English in Dutch society. What I discovered, however, was completely the opposite. Most Dutch people in cities are keen to practice their English, which was very helpful for me, as I only knew a few Dutch words. Dutch classes are also available at The Hague University for students who wish to learn the basics. I found that, after a few months, I recognized some words and was able to understand what a grocery store clerk was asking me, for example. The Hague is a small city and it is easy to get around on foot, by bike or by tram. The beach Scheveningen is a must-see, as is the Peace Palace. My accommodation was a five-minute walk from Den Haag Hollands Spoor, a train and tram station. It was about 15 minutes on foot to the main shopping streets (known to locals as “the centre”). I arrived about a week before orientation started to get settled and find my way around the city, though this is not necessary. Overall, The Hague University is an open and welcoming campus. While I was nervous the morning of my first day of orientation, I quickly made friends, as everyone was incredibly kind. Orientation was one week long, and consisted of tours, social events, games, and even a canal tour around The Hague. The term started the
next week. Each term was divided into two six-week semesters. As such, I had to go through
course registration twice, once at the beginning of my exchange and again halfway through.
Some courses, however, do run for 12 full weeks, whereas others run only for six. Classes were
usually 90 minutes long, and were once a week, though this varies depending on the program
and which classes you take. Most exchange students that I talked to (myself included) really
enjoyed the fact that we were never in class for more than three weeks in a row. Resit exam
week and holidays allowed us time to relax, get caught up in readings, or just travel! The
grading system was based on a 10-point scale. From what I understood, anything above a
seven was good. Generally, one was required to have a six or higher to pass, but again, this
depends on the course. If your grade was low, you had the opportunity to register for a resit,
which would take place approximately a month or so later. What I found, however, is that the
course load was generally lighter than that of SFU, which allowed me time to travel both in the
Netherlands and around Europe without falling behind in my readings. One of the reasons why
I chose to go on exchange in the Netherlands was its ease of travel within and outside the
country. Trains travel all around the small country, and international trains are also available.
Budget airlines also fly out of Schiphol and Eindhoven, allowing me to travel to countries such
as Portugal, Germany, Denmark, and the Czech Republic to name a few.

**Reflection after exchange**

Even now, it still doesn’t feel real that my exchange is over. The past six months were a
complete blur, and while it is definitely good to be home, I miss the Netherlands. It became my
home and I was comfortable there, despite not speaking much Dutch. I’ve learned that being
uncomfortable is one of the best ways to grow, and I’ve undoubtedly become a better
intercultural communicator because of my time abroad. I pushed myself to say “yes” to things I
might not have done at home, such as taking the lead on a group project or booking a
spontaneous trip. That being said, my time in the Netherlands was not always easy. Having
lived abroad last year, I knew to expect some homesickness, yet I missed the little things of
home, such my favourite type of chips or Canadian Netflix! I was definitely lonely sometimes,
and I even travelled solo. Those tough times ultimately made me a stronger, more independent
version of myself. I feel more confident in uncomfortable situations and I’m much more flexible to changing circumstances. For students looking to go on exchange, a piece of advice I can give is to approach every situation with an open mind. You will encounter people who will make you think, either for better or worse, but each experience brings growth. Embrace every moment as your exchange will be over before you know it. Going to the Netherlands on exchange was the best decision I’ve made in my post-secondary career. It may not be easy to leave home behind, wherever that may be, but it will make you a truly global citizen. So what’s my best piece of advice for students thinking of going on exchange? Go. Just go.

Windmills are everywhere! This is Kinderdijk, a UNESCO World Heritage Site
Reflections in the canals of The Hague

The Hague University of Applied Sciences
Scheveningen (the beach)

Binnenhof (Dutch Parliament) (Fun fact: the Dutch Prime Minister rides his bike to work!)