**Country:** Netherlands  
**Program:** Utrecht University (Immersion)  
**Term & Year Abroad:** Spring 2011  
**Gender:** Female  
**Major/Minor:** Sociology/ Feminist Studies

**Instructors**

- **What were they like when compared to UCSB instructors?**
  They were very similar and maintained a fairly laid back attitude-which was nice.

- **Could you call them by their first names?**
  Just like at UCSB, Some professors were comfortable with it and others were not

- **Was the student/instructor relationship more formal than at UCSB?**
  No, it was relatively informal.

- **Were they available for help during office hours?**
  By appointment only

**Courses**

- **Were the courses more difficult when compared to UCSB courses?**
  The courses were harder for me because most of my grades were based on exams only and I do not test well (no participation, few essays, and little “busy” work”). However, the content of the classes was similar, if not easier.

- **Was the grading system similar to UCSB?**
  The grading system was totally different in Utrecht. Grades are based on a scale of 1-10. Teachers do not give out “10” and rarely give “9s.” When grades were converted to UCSB’s scale, they were usually lower than I expected.

- **How did the course structure differ? Ex) did you have many assignments or just finals?**
  Like I mentioned before, I had few assignments. Mostly just exams and a few final papers,

- **Did you have oral and/or written exams?**
  Written

- **Was the final exam schedule flexible or inflexible?**
  More flexible than UCSB by far. They are more spread out, open to adjustment and most courses offer retakes if you fail the first time.

- **What kind of academic support, if any, did you receive?** N/a

- **Did you find you needed to be more independent and take more initiative abroad?**
  Yes, I was only in class for about 6 hours a week, so therefore, I had to learn to work more independently.

- **Was classroom participation expected?**
  Typically, yes

- **How were the host university courses different than UCSB courses?**
They met much less frequently and expected students to complete more work on their own time.

- **Were classes usually on certain days/times and for how long?**
Classes were longer and usually met 1-2 times a week.

- **What is the class culture like?  How important was it to be punctual?  Could you eat/drink in class?**
Everyone is on time to class in the Netherlands and people rarely leave class early. In most courses, students are allowed to eat etc, but there is almost always a “coffee” break that is held in the middle of each class, where students eat snacks and get coffee from vending machines etc.

**Language**

- **In which languages were the courses offered?**
   English

- **What language did you take your courses in?**
   English

- **If you took your courses in a foreign language, please provide info about your overall experience, difficulty of courses, language acquisition, placement exams, etc.**

**Host University**

- **How large is the university?  Student enrollment and approx campus size (smaller than UCSB)?  Is it an urban campus with many tall buildings or just a few building?**
The campus is spread out. The science and math classes are generally held on the modern “UCSB” like campus that is about 2 miles outside of the city center. The humanities and law classes are typically held in buildings that are spread throughout the city—located in between stores, cafes, homes etc.

- **Do the local students live on campus, at home, or off campus?**
Most students either live at home with their parents or rent rooms/apartments throughout the city. The university does not offer student housing but private rental companies (such as Short Stay Solutions) offers rental agreements that own on-campus apartment buildings. However, most of Short Stay’s apartments are usually reserved for international students.

- **If not located in the city center,**
  - **How far or close is it to the city?**
    De uithof (the main “campus”) is 1-2 miles away from the city center. But the courses offered in law and humanities are taught in the city center.

  - **What type of public transportation could you take – cost?**
The bus system is very simple to figure out and cost about 1.50 (euro) per ride

  - **Could students take cabs -cost?**
    Cabs are accessible but pricey, just like everywhere else. From De Uithof campus to the central train station (city center) it costs roughly 15 euros.

  - **How long would it take to get to the city center?**
My housing and classes was located in the city center so I was there! From the De Uithof campus it’s 10-15 minute bike ride and 10 minute bus ride

- **Are there student clubs on campus that UC students could join?**
  I am going to assume so, but they are not as available as they are at UCSB.

- **Is there a bookstore on campus? Where did you get your books?**
  There are bookstores in the city center that most teachers will instruct you to go to.

- **Is there a computer lab on campus? Or, should students bring laptops?**
  Students should bring absolutely bring laptop. There are computers in the libraries, but they fill up quickly!

- **What types of establishments are in the university’s neighborhood? (cafes, stores, etc).**
  The City Center has everything! Cafes, chain stores, bars restaurants etc!

**Housing**

- **What types of accommodations are available to UC students?**
  Housing is not provided through EAP. Students are required to find their own housing. However, the good news is-the university makes it very simple for you to find housing. They recommend you contact Short Stay Solutions, a private rental company that offers rental agreements arranged specifically for international students.

- **How close are they to campus?**
  It depends. Apartments are available on the De Uithof campus and others spread throughout the city and also in the city center (Remember: all humanities courses are taught in the center). Housing is first, come first serve… So if living on campus is a priority, apply for housing the day registration opens.

- **How did you find your housing?**
  I found my housing through the Short Stay Solution website. I registered early and got my first choice!

- **Where did you live and with whom?**
  I lived in the middle of the city center in Utrecht and I highly recommend living in the center! I lived in an apartment with 11 other international students.

- **If you lived off campus, was it difficult to find an apartment and roommate?** N/A

- **Were the rooms nicer or not than I.V./UCSB dorms?**
  Even though I shared a room, my room was twice as large as my dorm room and about three times larger than any room I have lived in IV. It was a nicely furnished split level room (my roommate lived on the second level), with wall length glass windows that opened into a beautiful public garden.

- **Was it more expensive than living in I.V.? How much was a typical rent cost in US dollars?**
  It was cheaper than my rent has ever been. Rent was 375 euro a month (about 500 USD).
- **How/who did you pay for housing?**
  I would pay the rental company for housing each month. Their office is easily located on the De Uithof campus.

**Food**
- **What was the food like?**
  A lot of fried food and a lot of Turkish fast food. The Dutch also love french fries and mayonnaise. Sandwiches are also available everywhere and they are amazing!

- **Where did you eat most of your meals? Cafeterias, restaurants, street vendors, etc?**
  I shopped for food about every other day and cooked food at home.

- **How much was an average meal?**
  If you ate out, it was typically between 4 and 8 euros.

- **What time of day did people eat lunch/dinner?**
  I would always eat lunch between noon and 1 PM. But dinner, I feel like people typically ate dinner later in the Netherlands. During the spring, it would be light outside until 11 PM, so during these months my house and I would usually eat dinner at about 10 PM.

- **Would it be difficult for vegetarians to find meals?**
  No.

**Travel/Safety**
- **If not discussed above, describe the public transportation system around your host university/city?**
  I discussed the bus earlier, but Utrecht Central train station is minutes away from campus. Train tickets are a bit pricey, but it is a fabulous way to get to Amsterdam quickly and travel throughout the country.

- **Did you feel safe in your host city? Are there tips you would offer future students?**
  I felt so safe in Utrecht, safer than I have ever felt in IV or in my hometown.

- **Describe the public transportation in your host country?**
  As I said before, trains are quick, on time, and come very frequently but they are expensive.

- **Was it difficult/easy to travel to neighboring countries?**
  YES! Usually I would fly using affordable budget airlines such as Ryanair or Easy Jet. If you buy train tickets well in advance, that can be cheap and convenient too. I also recommend taking buses, they are very cheap but not always the most enjoyable.

**Host City/Country**
- **What was the weather like?**
  When I first arrived, in January, the weather was consistently anywhere between 20-35 degrees. During winter it was also extremely windy and drizzly. The weather started to get nicer by the end of March and April was gorgeous and with consistently blue skies. It was overcast a majority of the time but did not rain as much as I expected. Unfortunately it did rain almost the entire month of June. But once winter ended the weather was similar to a Northern California Spring.
- Describe your host city…which California/US city is it similar to (if any)?
Honestly, Utrecht was unique in so many ways. If I were to compare it to any city in California, I would compare it to Berkeley. Utrecht is similar in size and the fact that the city functions around the university and university students. Many of the businesses/bars/shops/events/concerts etc cater towards student needs.

- What were some interesting/fun things that you did in the host city?
There are so many fun things to in Utrecht! On sunny days all the local Dutch residents take advantage of the weather and picnic along the canal, lounge in a park, or sit outside at a café. Biking is also extremely popular within the community. I went on several awesome bike rides to local towns, castles and lakes and rode through beautiful Dutch countryside. As far as nightlife goes: Utrecht has an extremely active nightlife. There are bars on almost every street corner. Most are casual, but some are more “club” like. On weekends and most weekdays bars in the city center are packed with friendly Dutch students. Many of the club venues also host concerts with famous singers and bands for affordable prices.

- How international was your host city in terms of tourism, cultural diversity, and international businesses?
I loved Utrecht because it is not a tourist trap and had no major tourist attractions. Culturally, Utrecht was pretty diverse. Like many Western European nations, Turkish, Moroccan, and Surinamese immigrants are common and apparent within the Utrecht’s community.

Culture

- Describe the cultural differences that you observed/encountered.
  o Time & punctuality
    This is stricter in the Netherlands. Teachers are always on time. Students also arrived on time to class.

  Eye contact & staring
  N/A

  o Relationships
    N/A

  o More formal dress in general, for women, for school, etc?
    It is definitely not a rumor that men and women dress more formally for school. Even wearing my “everyday” clothes to class, I would feel somewhat underdressed. Students never came to class wearing sweatpants, PJ bottoms or workout clothes.

  o Alcohol consumption
    People drink there just as often as they do in the States. However, I would say drinking is more casual. People drink more for the social experience and to enjoy their drinks, rather than just drinking for the purpose of getting drunk.

  o What culture shock did you go through?
    My culture shock was only positive. Initially, I was just in awe of the Dutch quality of life and relaxed living standards.

  o Other?
Banking

- **Were credit cards widely accepted?**
  Yes, but some places (usually supermarkets) would only accept European credit cards (ones with a chip in them that ours don’t have).

- **Did you open a local bank account? Was it easy?**
  No, because it would have been a long process to do.

- **If you did not open a local bank account, was it easy to withdraw money from the ATM? Which banks were popular & had low ATM fees?**
  I spent only cash the whole time I was abroad. I opened a bank account in the Bay Area that refunds all my ATM transactions fees (Mechanics Bank) so I was not worried about the ATM fees.

- **Were there ATMs on campus?**
  YES! And all throughout the city center.