Major/Minor: Political Science/Global Peace & Security

Country: Netherlands Program: University College Maastricht Term & Year Abroad: Fall 2009

Instructors
- What were they like when compared to UCSB instructors?

- Could you call them by their first names?
I referred to the Professors as “Professor so and so” but the T.A.s wanted to be called by their first names, similar to UCSB.

- Was the student/instructor relationship more formal than at UCSB?
No, because the school is so small it was quite informal.

- Were they available for help during office hours?

Courses
- Were the courses more difficult when compared to UCSB courses?
Yes, I found the courses to be extremely difficult compared to UCSB- especially when I was in a classroom among students who had a much broader base knowledge of history, etc than I did.

- Was the grading system similar to UCSB?
No, the Dutch use a grading scale from 1-10, with a 10 being a perfect score and near impossible to receive. EAP translates the grades into UC letter grades.

- How did the course structure differ? Ex) did you have many assignments or just finals?
There were not really assignments other than the finals, but most of the classes did have papers.

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

- Was the final exam schedule flexible or inflexible?
The finals schedule was pre set, but if you did poorly on a final the system allows you to resit the exam the next semester if you will be there.

- What kind of academic support, if any, did you receive?

- Did you find you needed to be more independent and take more initiative abroad?
Absolutely. Considering I didn’t know how the school system worked, what was expected of me, or what the cultural norms where, I had to use my own resourcefulness to find out this information. It was not spelled out for me, I had to find it out for myself.
- **Was classroom participation expected?**
  Yes, because the classes at UCM are so small (around 12 people) the lessons are mainly students discussing the topics with one another. There wasn’t pressure to dominate the conversation, but the intimate environment made it easier to participate.

- **How were the host university courses different than UCSB courses?**

- **Were classes usually on certain days/times and for how long?**
  Each small class met twice a week, and if it had a lecture that would meet once a week. The small classes lasted for two hours with a break in the middle. For each period (half a semester) a student would normally take two classes. UCM has four block of time throughout the day that all classes meet on.

- **What is the class culture like? How important was it to be punctual? Could you eat/drink in class?**
  The teachers made a big deal about being punctual at orientation, but I found that in reality they were more relaxed about it. Eating and drinking was allowed in class, especially since the classes went for 2 hours.

**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?**
  UCM is part of the larger Universiteit Maastricht, which in total has about 13,000 students. UCM is a smaller college within the University and has 600 students. The campus of UM is spread through the city of Maastricht, while UCM is located in a 15th century monastery nearby the UM school of business.

- **Do the local students live on campus, at home, or off campus?**
The university doesn’t provide campus housing for local students, so they all live in apartments in the city.

- **If not located in the city center,**
  - How far or close is it to the city?
  - What type of public transportation could you take – cost?
  - Could students take cabs -cost?
  - How long would it take to get to the city center?

- **Are there student clubs on campus that UC students could join?**
  Yes, UM has many clubs, especially sports clubs. UCM has its own student association called Universalis that does programs and trips for its students.

- **Is there a bookstore on campus? Where did you get your books?**
  UCM’s student association sells the books directly to you in the building, a very easy process.

- **Is there a computer lab on campus? Or, should students bring laptops?**
  There are a lot of computers in the UCM building, as well as in the UM business school nearby. I brought my laptop to class a lot anyway, because it was nice to be able to refer to online readings while discussing them.

- **What types of establishments are in the university’s neighborhood? (cafes, stores, etc)**
  Mainly delicious and unique looking restaurants, as well as sandwich shops and other places to get a quick bite.

**Housing**

- **What types of accommodations are available to UC students?**
  UM Guesthouse, a dormlike accommodation for international students with different buildings throughout the city and various distances from campus.

- **How close are they to campus?**
  The main guesthouse building is the closest to campus, about a ten minute bike ride. The rest are further, with some being across the river on the other side of the city.

- **How did you find your housing?**
  UCM told me about the guesthouse website and to book through them.
- Where did you live and with whom?
In the main guesthouse building, in a single.

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

- Were the rooms nicer or not than I.V./UCSB dorms?
There were multiple options for room sizes, and while they had cold floors with no rug the furnishing were all Ikea and they had big picture windows with nice views. Also the heating system was very good, a necessity in winter. As I had a large single with a pretty view, I would say it was much nicer than IV/dorms.

- Was it more expensive than living in I.V.? How much was a typical rent cost in US dollars?
My particular size room and building was around 14 euros a night since I was staying for 5 months. Approx. $580 /mo.

- How/who did you pay for housing?
I paid rent every month at the front desk in the main guesthouse building, where I lived.

Food
- What was the food like?
While the food in different regions of the Netherlands varies somewhat, the food in Limburg (where Maastricht is located) is known for rather rich and heavy cuisine, relying heavily on meat, potatoes, stews, and sweet or savory pastries. And of course, cheese -especially Gouda- is a national speciality. The Dutch are also very into coffee, and you can find all varieties and preparations of high quality in various coffee houses.

- Where did you eat most of your meals? Cafeterias, restaurants, street vendors, etc?
I cooked most of my breakfast and dinner in the Guesthouse, as we had a kitchen on our floor. When I was at school during the day, there were several sandwich shops as well as cafeterias in a few different school buildings where we could pick up a quick bite.

- How much was an average meal?
A sandwich or panini at a local campus stop was around 3 euros.

- What time of day did people eat lunch/dinner?
Lunch was eaten whenever we had a break from class, around 1230 or 1. Similarly, dinner was eaten whenever we got out of class, anywhere from 5-7. From what I observed normal dinner time is around 6, somewhat early compared to the rest of Europe.

- Would it be difficult for vegetarians to find meals?
While Dutch cuisine relies strongly on meat and I didn’t run into any vegetarians, it is perfectly possible to find meals without such ingredients.

**Travel/Safety**

- **If not discussed above, describe the public transportation system around your host university/city?**
  
  There is a very reliable and easy to use bus system that goes all over the city, in addition to stopping right in front of the Guesthouse. It’s easy to buy *stripenkaarts*, or punch cards that are handed to the bus driver to be stamped each time you get on the bus.

- **Did you feel safe in your host city? Are there tips you would offer future students?**
  
  I felt incredibly safe during my stay in Maastricht. I would recommend to anyone studying abroad to use common sense and be naturally cautious, especially if you are alone at night. That being said, I never felt unsafe even walking alone at night.

- **Describe the public transportation in your host country?**
  
  The Netherlands has a great train system that runs throughout the country. They are fast, clean, punctual, and all around well run. Even though Maastricht is about a 3 hour train ride form Amsterdam, each time I went the trip would fly by because it was so enjoyable.

- **Was it difficult/easy to travel to neighboring countries?**
  
  It was very easy to travel to neighboring countries. Maastricht’s nearest major airport is the Brussels airport, about a 1.5 hour train ride. Near the Brussels airport is Charleroi airport, where budget airlines like Ryanair fly out of. Additionally, from the Maastricht train station you can get to the Eurostar station in Brussels which can take you to Paris or London, and trains also go directly into Germany.

**Host City/Country**

- **What was the weather like?**
  
  The weather in the Netherlands in the summer was warm and beautiful. Early fall was also nice, but as the months progress it got colder. While it didn’t snow until right before I left (mid December), it would get down to freezing and night and rained quite frequently-warm coat, gloves, boots, raincoat, are definitely necessary.

- **Describe your host city…which California/US city is it similar to (if any)?**
  
  Maastricht really can’t be compared to any US city, mainly because it has the appearance of a mideval cobblestoned town. There aren’t many modern looking buildings and it has a very “old European” feel, which was part of its charm for me.

- **What were some interesting/fun things that you did in the host city?**
  
  Maastricht has amazing restaurants blending the cuisine of the surrounding areas, but many are very gourmet and high priced so that was a rare treat. There are lots of fun student bars that the university publicizes so you know which nights are big at each one. There is also a Spanish style dance club called the Meta which stays open until the early morning. Something I discovered near the end of my time abroad is Landbouwbelang- an artist’s squat in an old factory building near the
river that served cheap and delicious vegan meals on Monday nights. It’s cozy and a lot of young people gather there, and it was one of the coolest things I did in Maastricht.

- **How international was your host city in terms of tourism, cultural diversity, and international businesses?**

Especially in comparison to the rest of Holland, Maastricht is relatively diverse and international. Because it is near the borders of Germany and Belgium, it is a crossroads for travelers and business people, as well as a vacation destination for people that live in the surrounding countries. The cuisine especially is evidence of international influence.

**Culture**

- **Describe the cultural differences that you observed/encountered.**
  
  - **Time & punctuality**
    Dutch culture is the most punctual I’ve ever experienced—there are clocks everywhere and everything runs on time. This made life a lot easier and I really appreciated it.
  
  - **Eye contact & staring**
    n/a
  
  - **Relationships**
    The Dutch students I met were not as open or forward as we as Americans are used to. However, as the semester progressed and we became more comfortable in our classes, I came to realize that this was normal and didn’t have anything to do with me—they just take some time to warm up to people they aren’t familiar with.
  
  - **More formal dress in general, for women, for school, etc?**
    In Europe in general I found the dress to be more formal than here in California. In Maastricht, everyone dressed up to go to class. I never saw sweatpants or shorts. I got into the habit of dressing up there and I have carried that back with me to college here.
  
  - **Alcohol consumption**
    Alcohol consumption was pretty much what I expected—the students all drank, but because they have been drinking with their families and friends, they are used to it and don’t binge drink or take a lot of shots. It’s definitely still part of the student culture, but you are expected to know your limits and be responsible for your self.
  
  - **What culture shock did you go through?**
    I initially went through some culture shock as I was in unfamiliar surroundings with people I didn’t know and an unfamiliar language spoken. It almost felt like a dream for the first few weeks, but I gradually fell into a routine. Probably the hardest part initially was feeling alone since I didn’t know anyone yet, but as soon as I made friends the unfamiliarity started to melt away.
  
  - **Other?**

**Banking**

- **Were credit cards widely accepted?**
  Yes, but debit cards were necessary at places like grocery stores.
Did you open a local bank account? Was it easy?
I did, in order to use a debit card at grocery stores and to make it simpler to withdraw money from ATMs. ING bank makes it very easy for visiting students to open and close accounts within a few months with no extra charges.

- 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?

- Were there ATMs on campus?
There was an ATM on campus but it was kind of out of the way, in the Business Economics faculty building.