

Exchange semester report (Riga-Latvia)

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My semester abroad was a dream come true. This six months have definitely changed my life in all aspects. Living and studying in another country, meeting people with different visions about life, traveling with friends, experiencing local foods and drinks, all these things help anybody develop as a person.

In this Report I will talk more about the university where I studied for my winter semester and the courses to which I attended.



University

The University of Latvia with its 15,000 students, 13 faculties and more than 20 research institutes is one of the largest comprehensive and leading research universities in the Baltic States. The University offers more than 130 state-accredited academic and professional study programs. At University of Latvia, research is conducted in over 50 research fields which represent four main areas of inquiry: the humanities, sciences, social sciences, and education sciences. The University of Latvia pays great attention to the development of international collaboration. At present the University of Latvia has signed more than 500 agreements with 326 institutions in 31 European countries within ERASMUS program.

At UL, you can obtain an academic bachelor's or master's degree in humanities (philology, philosophy, history, theology a.o.), pedagogy, social sciences (economics,

communication studies, political science, psychology, sociology, law, management a.o.), sciences (biology, physics, geography, geology, chemistry, mathematics, environmental science a.o.), and health sciences (pharmacy, nursing). The UL also offers professional qualifications or bachelor's or master's degree, including MD, qualifications of doctor, teacher, social worker, economist, translator/interpreter etc. Doctoral study programmes offer a degree in biology, economics, computer science, demography, pharmacy, philology, philosophy, physics, geography, geology, engineering, law, chemistry, communication studies, medicine, mathematics, pedagogy, politics, psychology, sociology, theology and religious studies, management, linguistics, history, and environmental science.

The UL offers an opportunity to study interuniversity master's programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity", interuniversity master's programme "Studies of the Baltic Sea Region", master's programme "European Studies" and other unique study programmes. Each year, approximately 300 students of the UL study abroad with the help of international exchange programmes, thus perfecting their skills and abilities; in turn, the University of Latvia welcomes approx. 250 international students. The University of Latvia is renowned for its research on Latvian studies, material science, information and communication technologies, process simulation and socio-economic as well as environmental and health problems of the transition period.

At UL, research is conducted in over 50 research fields which represent 4 main areas of enquiry: the humanities, sciences, social sciences, and education sciences. The institutes of the University of Latvia have longstanding research traditions, and they cooperate with their respective faculties. For instance, the Institute of Solid State Physics is a European Union 6th Framework Programme Center of Excellence, where advanced research is conducted on nanotechnologies, holography, and robot technologies; the Institute of Educational Research of the Faculty of Education and Psychology carries out comparative research on education in cooperation with approx. 50 countries all over the world. At UL, students learn to conduct research under the guidance of experienced professors, participate in the research process and acquire specific skills. After successful completion of the PhD studies and presentation of a thesis students obtain Doctor's degree. Each year, the University researchers take part in the development of around 900 projects, participate in approx. 1,000 international scientific

conferences, publish approx. 700 research papers in peer reviewed journals. The students report in the annual Conference of the University of Latvia and publish the results of their research in “Scientific Papers of the University of Latvia” and in academic series, for example, “Agora” and “Domino”. The Innovation Centre of the University promotes cooperation between scientists and companies and commercialisation of selected research results.

Courses

For my semester abroad at the University of Latvia I have chosen four courses: Human development, Planning games, German language, Research methods and organization. I chose this courses because it seems it fits my domain and my home university curriculum. The courses studied during the exchange period are: Planning games as part of International entrepreneurship and innovation management, Research methods and organization as part of International management, Human development as part of Culture and history, German language as part of language skills. All the courses scoring the required 30 ECTS.

Human development

The course gives an overview of development theories, areas of human development, like health, education, employment, entrepreneurship, consumption, technology, culture, environment; reviews the processes that influence human development. The course advocates and promotes among social science students a humanistic approach to development planning and policies. In each of these areas is analyzed the situation, main problems, tried to find solutions for main development problems and analyzed the human development-friendly policy. The course gives the new social science professionals understanding of the many sides of human development, human policy and the role of such agents like state, local governments, NGOs, private sector, international organizations and other agents in human development.

Planning Games

The course is based on a series of simulations of business strategy games which are played between the course participants. The goal of the course is to use active training methods - planning games, to summarize knowledge and to get practical skills in the different profiles of entrepreneurship, strategical and tactical planning, management approach accounting, price formation, rational utilization of resources, bank activities, stock exchange activities, enterprise management, analyze of risk and in the different fields.

German language I

The aim of the course is to help students acquire the basic knowledge of the German language (at A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), paying a particular attention to the acquisition of the necessary minimum of vocabulary and those aspects of grammar that are needed for coping with everyday situations in spoken and written German language (at A1/A2 level). The linguistic and pragmatic aspects will be dealt with in the context of the intercultural perspective and interlanguage (German-French). The lessons will be complemented by the use of audio-visual media. From this course it is expected that the students will gain knowledge of the German language at A2 level. They will also acquire knowledge about German geography and society.

Research methods and organization

This course introduces research methods (quantitative and qualitative), gives practical directions in research organisation, analysing research results and presentation of them. For content of the course and recommended literature used foreign theoretical and practical experience in research. The main attention is devoted for preparation of research, selection of methods, the practical application of most used quantitative and quantitative methods. Updated sources of literature and internet sites will be passed to all students, as well as information on recent software packages. To receive credit points it is necessary to pass two tests, prepare three individual home tasks and prepare report on one of the given topics marked by star. Students have to agree on choice of report topic with other students and teacher. The main point in report is practical use of theoretical knowledge.

The courses to which I participated at the University of Latvia gave me a lot of useful knowledge, in my domain, that I can use in my future career.

Experiences outside of the university

In the six months that I spent living and studying in Riga, I had the opportunity to experience the Latvian culture. From the first week I've moved there, I started to meet nice people from all-over Europe and from Latvia, of course. The ESN helped us a lot, making this experience more pleasant by organizing open-minded events where the Erasmus students could interact with each other. With the people I met there I had the chance to travel to Tallin, Estonia and to Stockholm, Sweden, as well as in different parts of Latvia.

The practical knowledge that I got from this semester abroad concerning the communication in multicultural environments cannot be replaced by any course, seminar or other form of organized lecture.

In this report I would like to thank the Erasmus officials from Alpen-Adria University from Klagenfurt, and University of Latvia from Riga for facilitating, organizing and financing this superb semester abroad.

Sincerely,
Ioan Popovici