

Erasmus + Student Semester Study Experience Abroad

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Institution: University of Stavanger, Norway

For the spring 2017 semester, I was hosted at the University of Stavanger in Stavanger Norway. This semester was part of my Erasmus Mundus masters program, European Masters in Migration and Intercultural Relations (EMMIR), therefore I did not have to do a separate application for the institution. The courses I enrolled in were also separate courses given only to those who are in my program.

In preparation for my semester abroad, I organized my accommodation two months prior. After hearing from previous international students who had studied at the University of Stavanger and had applied for housing with limited to dismal results, I decided it would be in my best interest to search for private housing in the city. It was important for me to have accommodation which was easily accessible by public transportation, closer to the city center to be able to attend cultural events that took place and also living in a shared environment with many internationals. The costs of Norway in comparison to Germany were a significant concern of mine so it was in my best interest prior to arrival to work and save money and look for all significant opportunities of extra student funding.

The Norwegian people were very welcoming to international students. This was in part because of the environment of Stavanger and the university. The University of Stavanger has an integral and dynamic international student association which was constantly organizing events for students. The university in general was equipped with tools and resources for English speakers, such as conferences, lectures and workshops for paper writing or research skills. Stavanger is also an international small city with over 100 different countries represented because of its past dynamic oil industry where many foreigners come to work and earn a living.

As the University is fairly new, the facilities, buildings and campus are well-maintained, clean, and has everything students need to succeed. The library has a plethora of English books and resources and is subscribed to most of the academic

journals needed for research. The library is also open 24 hours for students which was a great treat after the University of Oldenburg library hour restraints.

I felt like I was given plenty of space, encouragement and in a good environment surrounded by dedicated students and professors who allowed me to succeed.

The courses I took were Migration and Integration, Multiculturalism, Gender and Migration, and a course focused on Emigration and Immigration from the Scandinavian countries. While the latter course was interesting because we were studying in Norway and were given the opportunity to visit refugee asylum centers, and organizations that aided those getting settled in Stavanger from Afghanistan, Iraq, etc. I would not have taken this course under different circumstances. But it helped put my academic studies' content on migration and refugees into perspective about the actuality of situations of how Norway and other European countries accept refugees.

The support staff at the College of Education that I was studying under were absolutely fantastic. They were available at all times for questions; whether it be about our studies, access to facilities at the university or about living in Norway and fundamental questions about currency, transportation etc. The program I studied with also allowed us the option to take Norwegian language courses, although I did not take advantage of this since I was already enrolled in conversational french at the Institut Francais in Stavanger and also continuing my German language studies privately. Many of my fellow colleagues did take advantage of this though and enjoyed it and told me how much it connected them more to Norwegian people and the country. There were also "welcoming" workshops that taught us about basics of Norwegian culture, political and social life and a cooking class of Norwegian traditional dishes. This not only engaged us with the Norwegian culture but bonded us more to the professors, facilitators and our cohort of students.

My social life was active as well with other internationals because of our initial engagement on campus. I took a volunteer position at the student run concert venue and bar, Folken in the center of town which allowed me to enjoy free concerts and work with other internationals every week. In general, the high costs of Norway made it difficult to experience everything that was possible there-such as boat cruises, ski trips, sledding, etc. There were many things I had planned on doing while in the country

which I could not afford to do. However, because the country is so naturally beautiful, spacious and full of hikes, it was easy to plan day hikes in the surrounding area or just set off and walk from campus to a mountain overlooking the fjords.

All in all, my semester experience in Norway was absolutely wonderful. I felt more academically focused at the University of Stavanger than I had been in Norway because of the surrounding environment, and university facilities. Though the challenges of costs and sometimes the weather being a factor making it difficult to get out and engage more, I took the most out of my time there. I suggest to future students studying at the University of Stavanger for a semester to search private housing since it may be more affordable and convenient than that provided by the housing department at the university, to engage in the international student associations and volunteer when possible, to get a monthly bus pass to make it easier to see the city and surrounding islands and nature, take a language-whether it be Norwegian or another, make use of the phenomenal atmosphere of the library and explore the natural beauty as much as possible.