

## Erasmus Experience Report (Winter Semester 2019/20)

**Host University:** University of the West of England (UWE Bristol)

I am in my last semester studying European Master in Territorial Development at the Faculty of Architecture and Landscape Planning at Leibniz University in Hanover. I spent my third semester (Winter 2019/2020) studying at the Department of Geography and Environmental management in The University of West of England – Bristol.

### 1. Preparation prior to my semester abroad

Me, along with my classmates were provided a brief presentation on the various partner universities and the courses offered. While the presentation gave a good overview about the choices of universities, there was uncertainty in the number of seats available in each partner university. The information on the Leibniz University website about various documents and the step by step actions needed to be taken were of extreme help. The application process started well ahead of time prior to the ERASMUS semester. I was accepted as an exchange student in a matter of weeks at my partner university post my paperwork submission. The ERASMUS coordinator at UWE Bristol was helpful and responsive in email correspondences for my queries regarding the courses and accommodation situation. There were 5 of my batchmates including who were selected in UWE Bristol. Neither of us five were EU-Citizens and with frequent and mutual communication with each other we were able to prepare for the online university registration, Visa, accommodation search etc. I got the student visa for UK within 5-6 weeks of applying for it. There were uncertainties in the courses that were being offered in the upcoming year at UWE Bristol and we were assured that we could make changes to the chosen courses after we reach the partner university.

I started looking for accommodation options right after I was selected which was 6-7 weeks prior to my departure to Bristol. The accommodation offered at the UWE were long term with a minimum of 6 months stay and were expensive for my budget. I got a nice room in a house looking for a Paying Guest close to the university. The monthly rent was almost half of the hostel accommodation provided by the university and I was happy about being able to save more and use it for other living expenses.

### 2. Studying at the partner university

The UWE Campus was lively, and it got me excited to study there from the very first time I entered it. All the ERASMUS students were invited to a three-day welcome event where various kiosks were arranged under different themes of information required. The staff and volunteers were very helpful in guiding us through various mandatory and non-mandatory parts of the event. After completing my mandatory procedures of collecting the student ID cards and registering myself in the intranet, I went to a bike rental kiosk that was providing free bicycles for students for 2-3 months as an environmentally friendly initiative in the city. Staying 2-3 kilometers outside the campus, this offer was so useful for me. I got the bike along with the necessary accessories. The welcome event culminated with a lovely boat-ride and dinner for the students, in the port side of the city.

On the beginning day of our lectures, I along with the other ERASMUS students from different countries were given a very walk welcome by the department faculty. They also gave us an exact overview of the courses offered and their assessment structure. It was to a little extent different from what I had

received back in my Host university, but the process of updating the courses in my learning agreement was simple and so it was not an inconvenience to me. I chose two 15 credits courses for mandatory credit assessment and 2 more to just attend the lectures and participate in discussions. It was a good decision to do the latter as the discussions were very insightful and definitely helped me in building my knowledge towards diverse topics. In addition to this, the faculty members were also very encouraging towards the ERASMUS student in the class sessions. I had a lot of fun exchanging experiences from my native country and my host country. As a part of the curriculum, we were taken to Liverpool for a visit around the city and learn its urban planning dynamics. As some of the courses extended till after my lecture period, the faculty were flexible with suggesting alternate modes of evaluation like writing technical papers and giving presentations within my stay period.

### 3. Off-campus life and leisure time

I can happily say that I used my semester abroad period to the fullest. With my rental bike, I cycled a lot in and around the city of Bristol. It was specifically wonderful as I stumbled into many amazing graffiti works done by various artists including the famous ones done by Banksy. Since the University is uphill compared to the city center, cycling back to university and my accommodation was tiring though worthwhile. Bristol is an amazing city with lots of cultural offerings and great cafes. The public transport within the city is well connected and frequent, but sometimes unreliable if you have to use it to go to the countryside. Almost everyone I had the chance to meet for even a short time were extremely friendly and helpful. It definitely built my love for the city. Me and my ERASMUS friends used every sunny day as an opportunity to plan a day trip to the countryside and weekend trips to cities like Cardiff, London, Bath, Birmingham, Edinburgh etc. The winter semester experience was multifold before my return to Germany, as I got to experience their Christmas markets and holiday festivity.

### 4. Summary

In conclusion, from starting as an anxious student being uncertain about the courses and accommodation to loving the semester abroad experience to the fullest, I would do it again if I could. Barring the Brexit situation and future ERASMUS collaboration with the UWE, if given a chance I definitely recommend a semester abroad at UWE Bristol. It not only fulfilled my academic expectations but also my personal ones.