

Student Report Exchange Period abroad 2014-2015  
The Warsaw University  
13 February 2015

1. Study programme, courses and education in general.

During my stay in at the Warsaw University in Poland, I have attended a semester provided by the faculty of law and administration, as well as entertained a couple of courses in the Centre for Europe, an institution associated with the mentioned faculty. With regard to modules available for Erasmus students, it is quite broad, however most of the courses have a low ECTS value, especially at the faculty of law. Moreover, for those who are about to attend studies in Warsaw or elsewhere in Poland I advice to be careful with the central registration system "USOS" . However useful, during the course enrollment period it tends to block due to a server overburdened by a large amount of users using this service simultaneously. It is also very important to carefully read all announcements that appear on USOS in order to avoid unpleasant surprises such as missed date of may "attaching" chosen classes in order to receive your marks in the end of an examination period. For this reason one may find him-/herself in an unfortunate situation of attending even 8 courses within one semester. Nevertheless, such an inconvenience might likely be compensated by the fact that Erasmus students are approached with a large dose of leniency and, at least in my case, no compulsory academic books were provided but for a couple of positions recommended as optional readings, and a few short articles to be read prior to lectures were assigned. Hence, one should not worry about the workload during the exam session which, as a matter of fact, is quite short. Describing it in a greater detail, it is usual for teachers to set their own dates as some students are required by their universities to depart sooner than others. They are also very helpful when a student wishes to attend an examination sooner, and agree upon a day of choice as well as the form. Honestly speaking, I had a presumption that there is nothing that an essay cannot fix. Hence, after last lectures take place one has a chance of having had their exams passed already.

Moreover, for those who are about to attend studies in Warsaw or elsewhere in Poland I advice to be careful with the central registration system "USOS" . However useful and necessary, during the course enrollment period it tends to block due to a server overburdened by a large amount of users logged in this service simultaneously. It is also very important to carefully read all announcements that appear on USOS in order to avoid unpleasant surprises such as missed date when you may "attach" chosen classes in order to receive your marks in the end of an examination period.

As stated in the report form, my topics of choice were:

NB: At Polish schools in general class attendance is compulsory and is carefully checked at all times. In case of force majeure troubles, do not hesitate to approach professors. You might be asked to present an essay as a compensation for missed classes.

1. Commercial Law and Basic Institution of Company law – I
  - a. During this module we were taught about particularities of companies' sorts on the basis of the Polish Commercial Companies Code. The course lasts entire year, therefore as an Erasmus student attending one semester only, one needs to pass an oral exam after the last class or earlier upon professor's consent. Questions were quite technical, requiring a good knowledge of the classes' content.
2. Competition law of the European Union
  - a. Definitely the most interesting module, I strongly would recommend to attend, thanks to knowledgeable and energetic professor Marta Sendrowicz. Her command of English was also excellent while elaborating on the aspects of the EU competition policy and issues pertaining thereto. We were taught about, among others, the impact of various forms of contracts be it vertical or horizontal, we approached merger control etc. Examination was based on the group-work during which students were provided with 4 topics to choose from in order to subsequently prepare a presentation within 30 minutes.
3. EU Development Policy
  - a. The class touched upon the issues such as Millennial Development goals of the UN, sustainable development and humanitarian involvement of the EU. One could choose whether to entertain any kind of examination at all. Sufficiently frequent attendance equated the lowest pass grade. One wishing to obtain a higher mark were presented with 3 kinds of an assessment to choose from: an essay, presentation or an oral exam.

I would strongly advice to adhere to the latter as it offers a good opportunity to bolster up your average of grades.

4. International Law in International Relations
  - a. Lecture led by professor Czaplinski was a relaxing and informative module. One could absorb some broader knowledge on the public international law and states cooperation on that field, with the emphasis on diplomatic relations. Assessment was based on one's attendance as well as on active lecture participation e.g. during discussions.
5. Legal Mediation
  - a. It was an exceptional lecture from among all the modules I have participated in. Lecturer's activity was limited to a brief powerpoint presentation, which all students had received at the end of the course for the sake of exam preparation. The fair share of every single session had been devoted to students who had to prepare role-play exercises reflecting a given aspect of mediation, for instance the rules of proper communication in contentious cases, nourishing features of a good mediator, or resolving a dilemma whether lawyers should be allowed to entertain the office of a mediator. Examination had a form of a test based on lectures and additional readings assigned by the teacher.
6. Nations and Nationalisms
  - a. Seminar would prove interesting for ones interested in the philosophy and theory of law. In the course of 6 lectures we had analyzed a corresponding number of scholars and their publications in order to absorb various approaches towards the definition of the nation and nationalism, as well as how those two terms correspond with one another and which one provides origin for the other and vice-versa. Examination was particularly interesting as it involved participation in a 15minutes long discussion with the teacher on personal views of a student and potential application of the fathered knowledge in the daily situations, for instance as a Polish national I had to juxtapose the term of national identity with the European counterpart thereof.

Finally, the Polish grading system comprises marks 1 to 6, with the latter being, as the common joke explains, reserved for the teacher or the Father God exclusively. Hence, obtaining 5/5,5 may be considered as receiving the highest mark possible.

On the Dutch grading equivalents see:

<http://www.rug.nl/feb/education/exchange/courseinformation/gradeconversionfeb.pdf>

## 2. Language and language preparation.

After studying at RUG, one should have no linguistic concerns. Required level of proficiency at the Warsaw University is B2, and a lot of teachers still seem to struggle, but they manage to elaborate on topics more or less in an adequate manner.

Unsurprisingly, locals in Warsaw speak Polish, a subspecies of Slavic language family and, according to numerous rankings, one of the World's most difficult languages to learn (mind, it has nothing less but 7 levels of conjugation). In addition, the majority of Poles speaks little or no English, even in Warsaw, however they are very helpful whenever they come across a foreigner in distress. Having that in mind, it is a wise choice to attend a free-of-charge language course offered by the university itself. Knowing a few basic expressions is unusually very well received by natives, and may help you in navigating through the city as Warsaw lacks bilingual information plates (the University area is not an exception here, which is quite shameful) and stops-announcements in the public transportation. However, if you manage to commemorate main streets in the vicinity of places you wish to get to, it should suffice to decode route schemes.

## 3. Finances and general matters

For those who come from the Euro zone countries, Poland will prove a very cheap place to spend you exchange in. Approximate relation of Polish currency Zloty(PLN) to Euro presents itself as 1EUR=4,20PLN.

Monthly cost of living in Warsaw should oscillate at approximately 2700PLN (Judging by my own experience, the Erasmus grant does not stand for much of a financial help here. But it is still enough to cover small expenses one has to face upon arrival.)

Moreover, as a student you are entitled to 50% discount on a large variety of services such as cinema/theatre /museum tickets, public transportation (An electronic ticket, paired to your student card, which allows you to use any form of public transportation within the city for 90 days costs 140 PLN, that is approximately 35 euro), even while travelling around the Poland.

4. preparation and contact with the faculty abroad (e.g. lecturers, fellow students, other exchange students)

5. housing (rent, what kind of housing, recommended neighborhoods, etc.)

Prepare for high monthly costs which is, at times, disproportionate to the quality of the residual space. I would say that average prices vary between 1000PLN and 1500PLN, but do get in touch with natives since they mostly are very keen on helping you to find a decent, affordable place to stay. Poles are well-known for their hospitality.

I was not particularly tempted by an offer to rent a place in a student dormitory due to frequent parties taking place over there. For those willing to forgo administrative costs of finding a place to stay through university services, I would advice to navigate through Facebook as one may find more than plenty of rooms offered for rent/sublet by Polish students. There is also an announcements board next to the International Office.

A lot of classes are offered to both local and Erasmus students and it is common that students from the same country form clusters. However, it does not pose an obstacle to meet new people and make international friends. Getting to know a couple of Polish people is usually beneficial if you wish to learn about Poland from the native perspective. They might uncover a charming side to this country of contrasts.

When it comes to neighbors, you should not expect much. Polish people have an inherent distrust gene which makes them keep social relations at a distance that seems safe. In a dormitory where other international students reside, the situation will obviously differ.

6. guidance / reception at host university

The International Office at the Warsaw University did a great job when it came to providing a support for international students. At the very beginning there was an opening ceremony where all information is provided. In addition, the local Erasmus student organization organized plenty of events to attend, including cultural festivals as well as trips to the most important places in Poland, and this year even to the Czech Republic. One has to be quick with reserving a place on the bus as tickets are often sold out within few days.

Elaborating on the study programme, it was not demanding at all. However interesting some lectures were, prepare that you do not get to study the subjects you select during application. It might happen that one will have to amend the list of courses a few times due to a couple of reasons be it colliding time where other classes take place, or too low ECTS value. In my case, I had to study at 3 different places in the city during one day only. It was burdensome to commute as well since I had too less time to arrive on time from one class to another. It is quite usual to see students entering the class 30min later. Luckily enough, certain classes last only 6 weeks, and some seminars take place on every second week.

Study sessions last 90minutes without a break. It is also uncommon to consume during the classes.

Whenever one has doubts, or finds oneself in a distressful situation, the International Office offers a lot of support. There are health care facilities within the central campus, however I cannot provide a personal opinion as to their quality since I did not resort thereto.

7. Other (tips, suggestions, comments, opinions, etc.)
  - a. Do not ever forget your student pass, as without it you may not access the university library, and most importantly, the monthly tickets is encoded on it. It is also frequently required in order to reaffirm your right to discounts.
  - b. A good restaurant-alternative to try a genuinely Polish(and fairly organic) dish, while experiencing the sphere of the Communist Regime reality, is a milk bar. It is possible to entertain a two-course meal for two for less than 8 EUR.
  - c. Discover places Warsaw offers, it is a city that reflects the very nature of the entire country characterized by contrasts.

- d. Download “jakkolajde.pl” an app that is absolutely necessary to get anywhere in the city, and it is in English.

To conclude, apart from a couple of stumbles, entertaining a semester in Warsaw is likely to become a unique experience and a great alternative to the most popular Erasmus destinations.