

## **Exchange Period University of Lisbon**

### **University Life**

The first week at the University of Lisbon is probably the most exciting part of the Erasmus. The Academic Association of the Lisbon School of Law had an extensive schedule for integrating the international students. In their program they had activities to meet your fellow Erasmus colleagues as well as get to know the University campus, the Portuguese culture and to take part in several events such as Portuguese dinner, surfing classes, Portuguese language classes and apply for trips all over Portugal. In the 'Welcome Session', they arranged a day for you to get your life in Lisbon started. Therefore, they would guide you through making a student card, a bank account, apply for your courses and organise your schedule. They also had representatives to invite you to form sport teams for volleyball, football, etc as well as representatives of the 'Erasmus Life Lisboa', the group who would show you around the nightlife in Lisbon as well as some great rooftops. In addition to the first week introduction, they had a buddy program in which you get assigned a Portuguese friend from the university to show you around and help you with getting some summaries for the exams.

Regarding the courses, there was a list given to us in the first week with several courses available for Erasmus students. If you were able to speak Portuguese, then you could apply for pretty much any of the courses options, from first to final year of the law Bachelor. Those courses were taught and graded in Portuguese and the final exams were taken around January. Apart from those, they also had a list of courses taught in English, as there were other Erasmus students whose level of Portuguese were not good enough to follow full Portuguese classes.

### **Exams**

Normally, it would be up to the Professors to decide whether you would have to write their exams or write papers in English, Portuguese or any other language the professor understands. Some of the professors were fluent in German, Spanish and French. Classes were compulsory. The attendance was in fact quite decisive for when the professor would decide on your final grade. They do appreciate students participating in classes and that helps you boost your grade up, however, it can get quite difficult to get your voice heard as some of the classes have over sixty students.

There was also the option for students to attend 'Intensive Courses'. These lasted for a week, were mandatory, amounted to 3 ECTS and were taught in English by guest lecturers from different Universities around the world. The intensive courses were much smaller than normal classes, of around ten to fifteen people. The professors invited would normally have worked on making academic papers and be leading the discussion on the subjects proposed in the intensive course. Therefore, the classes were very interesting, and you would allow you to get a proper insight on the subject as it would be taught in a very formal way but always with discussions and group debate. I would say that a useful tip is to would be read their papers before going to the classes. The examination for those courses were up to the guest professor to decide. Some of them decided for a written exam by the end of the intensive course week, some others would give the option to write for a paper with a flexible deadline. Although the papers were quite lengthy (around ten to twenty pages following the academic structure, bibliography and footnotes), I could say that the possibility to write papers in some classes

allowed me to explore some subjects that I am quite interested. It was quite interesting to put in words what I learnt in the different courses as well as investigate further some of the topics and make use of comparative law; normally Portuguese and another country (The Netherlands or your home country for example).

Concerning the written exams, in my opinion, they were more demanding than I expected. It was composed of five essay questions to be answered in one hour. Most of the students got low grades. The grading system is quite different than in the Netherlands, from 0 to 20 points. To be honest I am not entirely sure I understand it. However, in general, my impression was that it is impossible to score full points. For most courses, the maximum people would score was 17 points. Closer to the deadline I had to spend most of my time writing papers and studying, which made the experience at times stressful. However, this was perhaps because as a Portuguese-speaking student I was regarded as a 'regular student' and not an Erasmus student. I believe other Erasmus students I met in the faculty had a much more laid-back experience. Nevertheless, I would recommend the University for other students. The professors were great and quite approachable. In case you would not understand something, they would provide you with further material to read. Especially having the chance to have classes with professors from other universities was quite a refreshing experience.

### **Language**

Although I speak Portuguese from Brazil, I had no problems understanding their language. But it was also quite helpful to ask some fellow Portuguese students for synonyms of words (also quite fun to do so). I also had the option of writing papers in English. Almost all Erasmus students I met took part in language courses throughout the year and their feedback was mostly positive. Some students took private lessons with Portuguese students; others took a language course at the university or at language centers in the city center.

### **Financial Matters**

The financial matters were much easier to deal with when compared to the Netherlands. Shopping for groceries was very inexpensive and very delicious and fresh. I would go almost every day to the University cafeteria, which offers a complete meal with a drink and dessert for 2,50 euros. Dining and drinking in town was much more affordable than in Groningen and also the options were incredible. I fortunately did not have to pay rent as I have family in Seixal, the other side of the river from Lisbon. I heard from other students that it is quite hard to find cheap accommodation in Lisbon, but it is quite comparable to the Groningen situation. Most of my international friends paid around 350 euros per month, but my Portuguese friends somehow managed to get places to pay around 200/250 Euros for places close to the city center, while those living directly in the center paid 300-350 Euros. The nicest places to live in Lisbon are probably Marques de Pombal, Lapa, which are quite wealthy residential neighborhoods. Lapa was very quiet, safe and authentic. Other great neighborhoods are (1) Intendente and Graça, which are very multicultural, inexpensive and where you could find emerging artists and musicians, the area is sometimes still regarded as 'dangerous' although I never experienced anything negative myself. (2) Bairro Alto, Baixa, Restauradores, Rossio are in the heart of the city center, where the parties are cool restaurants are. Rossio can be quite fun to live in but I guess stressful at times because of the number of tourists. Making a public transport card is a must and if you get the student card sorted already in your first days in Lisbon, it can facilitate your travels with discount and make it a lot cheaper for the whole semester.

## **Guidance**

As I mentioned before, the University offered a Welcome Session and had an introduction week, which was quite helpful with getting to know the University. They also had an introduction seminar in the beginning of September, for Erasmus students only. We were informed of procedural aspects of our semester at the University of Lisbon, a guideline was handed to us as well as the list of the courses in English to apply to. In addition, there were pamphlets on health care, the university's library, accommodation possibilities and Erasmus organizations. The International Relations and Erasmus office was the office for the exchange students to go in case of any problems they might have. That office was opened every day for a couple of hours and you could go there without having an appointment. However, I must say that they were quite disorganized. Unfortunately, my experience with the Erasmus office was not very pleasant. Although they treated me quite well when I would go talk to them in person, my requests were barely ever sorted straightaway, there would be a change they would forget about it and I would have to return to their office a few more times. They were also the ones responsible for coordinating the Intensive Courses, therefore dealing with the application requests as well as letting us know which classroom and times the courses would happen. They would change classrooms last minute sometimes and fail to let all students know about it. The main problem I encountered was concerning the registration for courses. We had to do it three different times because there would be some problem on their part. They would gather all the exchange students and try to sort out our registrations. It was a big mess. They argued that there was a problem with the system in the first time, then they said there were major changes in the schedule of some courses in the second time and the third time was it was to fix mistakes of courses that people were wrongfully registered for. Because of the delays, and another course that I could only apply in November, I could only submit my learning agreement quite late and therefore, I had to wait a long time to receive the Erasmus money. I believe that my experience there would have been much more relaxed if it was not for the uncertainty of what was going to happen due to their lack of organization and preparation to deal with problems exchange students would encounter.