

Catholic University of Leuven, Autumn Semester 2019-2020

My study program:

The courses at Leuven are much more difficult and worth less credits (3-6ECTS). This means that most likely you will have to take 6-7 courses. The workload is incredibly stressful as they are not split apart into blocks but rather 6 exams in one month sometimes back to back with 14 weeks of material to prepare. There is also very little free time as many weeks will have over 20 hours of lectures. The lectures usually do have a break but the break is a few minutes at most and sometimes they are skipped. Also note that the exams are all handwritten and very different to the style of exams in Groningen. Many students decided that the workload was too much and simply skipped half of them to retake them, doing this will delay your graduation as will failing any exam as the resits are in August.

The classes I took are:

International business law 6 ECTS

This course was extremely broad with 12 distinct topic areas. The lectures are not the most interesting, they will regularly have over 100 slides in a single session and they can be fairly technical. Nonetheless, the course overall was insightful and I feel like I learned a lot. The exam was fair and reflected the course and is manageable.

European criminal law 6 ECTS

The lecturer for the course is great. The classes are highly interactive and interesting. I would recommend this course even if criminal law does not interest you as it's fairly different from many of the other courses. The exam reflected the material and is manageable but requires extensive preparation as you will need to know many cases, conventions and directives.

Law of international organisations 6 ECTS

The course was taught on a fairly general level but the exam was the opposite. The material in no way reflected the exam and it is almost impossible to prepare. The exam contained almost nothing that was covered and there was simply no time to search for anything. I would advise against taking this course.

The law of the WTO 3 ECTS

This was the most interesting course. Although the course is technical it contained practical classes and had many guest lecturers. I feel like I learned the most in these classes. However, despite being 3 credits the workload is practically the same as for bigger courses. The Exam was fairly reflective of the course the main issue was the time allowed. Overall, I would recommend this course.

European financial regulation 4 ECTS

This was also an interesting course, the course is very different to anything in Groningen. I would recommend this course despite it being fairly difficult.

Social policy and law 6 ECTS

This course is almost a must have. The classes are highly interactive and has lots of active participation and many guest lectures. The course finishes early then others and is composed of a presentation, three small essays and one bigger essay instead of an exam. This is much better then having another exam at the same time.

Housing

I was very unlucky with housing, the rent is 580 months for a room that is in very bad condition. However, I have heard others having much better housing for less. The housing is fairly comparable to Groningen, perhaps with slightly more supply.

Preparation and contacts with the faculty abroad

The preparation was done very well, little had to be done in advance and there wasn't an unnecessary amount of documentation. The University was very helpful with everything.

Finance and other conditions

There are hardly any additional costs at Leuven. Bikes are available for rent but they are unnecessary as the city is about the size of Groningen's center so everything is a short walk away. Housing and groceries will be the main expenses. Groceries in Belgium are more expensive than in the Netherlands and the stores are not the same quality. You can expect slightly higher living costs. The train connections are better and as Brussels is very close travelling may be cheaper but there isn't much time for that.

Culture, free time and travelling

The Belgian student culture is fairly similar to the Netherlands, the city has many bars and pubs and restaurants. The people are extremely friendly and open, the Belgian students are in many cases in the same lectures and are a lot less separated from the internationals than in Groningen. I did not have too much time to travel but there are great places to see in Belgium that can be quickly reached and as the location is so central it is also very easy to travel to other countries.

Conclusion

Overall I would say that my exchange in Leuven was a positive one but I would definitely not recommend it to everyone. You can expect much more stress than in Groningen as the courses are more difficult and the structure only makes this worse. If you want to challenge yourself then this is perhaps the best exchange to do so but any failed exam may delay your education. However, one benefit of not having the year be split into blocks is that if you wish to work or participate in activities like moot courts, research projects and model UN then you can do this without worrying about exams at the same time.