

Exchange at Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Autumn 2019

Study Programme

Jagiellonian University has a good variety of courses available in English for exchange students. The fact that the majority of the courses only have one 1,5 hour lecture per week, with no seminars or working groups, makes timetable collisions less likely. The courses offered by the faculty of law covered a variety of topics: from very narrow areas such as Freedom of Speech in the American Supreme Court to more general introductory topics such as Introduction to Intellectual Property Law or Comparative Law. There are also many courses covering different aspects of Polish and Eastern European legal systems, but also multiple international and European law courses, which I preferred.

Registration for the courses is quite hectic, as the courses fill up within minutes after the registrations open. However, if you are prepared and know which courses to pick, it is not impossible to get all your planned courses. However, I heard that exchange students from other faculties had difficulties signing up for any courses since all of them were full within seconds.

The courses that I chose were: International Trade and Investment Law, Refugee Law, Monetary Law and Monetary Policy, American Constitutional law, Introduction to Comparative Law, Intellectual Property Law and Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters in the EU. I also took an additional French language course. All courses were worth 5 ECTS, except International Trade and Investment Law, which was 7 ECTS. So initially I ended up taking 37 ECTS worth of courses because I wanted to see the first weeks which courses I enjoyed the most. I ended up missing the de-registration deadline and taking 7 courses instead of 6. Since the study load is not as big as in Groningen, I managed well and ended up passing all the courses. However, I do not recommend taking any extra courses, since it may only cause unnecessary stress. Furthermore, in the beginning, I was slightly intimidated by taking 6-7 courses at once since in Groningen we have had only 2 courses at the same time, but the work was distributed over a longer time period, so it ended up being very manageable. Generally, the level of study was much lower than in Groningen.

I would recommend future students to take Intellectual Property law and International Trade and Investment Law, if you are at all interested in these topics. IP law course was my favourite because it gave an excellent and simple, yet very broad introduction to a complicated topic.

Not all courses have exams, some only require attendance and active participation in class or an assignment at the end of the year. For the exams, the professors of the courses were very flexible for exchange students. In all subjects, there were at least 4 exam dates that you could pick from, and as much as 8 in some. At first, I was quite concerned of the fact that the exam period would overlap with the start of the semester in Groningen, but since the professors organized extra term essays for exchange students like me who had to leave Krakow earlier, it was no problem. In half of my courses, we were also given the opportunity to choose from an oral or written exam. The exams that I took were very easy, which I believe is due to the fact that I am used to the study load and work ethic of the Netherlands.

Language

All my courses were 100% in English and the level of English spoken by the professors was very good. All study material was also in English, which was essential. The university does offer a Polish language course, but you need to pay for it separately. However, you can take other languages, such as German, French, Russian and Spanish, for free. I followed the French course, but since the teaching is in French and/or Polish, they only allow you to take a language course if your level is already at least A2.

Outside the university, people are very reluctant to speak English and often come off as rude when you apologize for not speaking Polish and ask if they could speak English. This happened to me every day in supermarkets, restaurants and other customer service points. It was rather frustrating at times, especially in places such as the hospital, post office or train station, where all information is in Polish and you really need

help. Therefore, I did find the language barrier quite hard at times, but thankfully Google Translate helped in acute situations.

Finance and other conditions

Generally, Poland is a rather affordable country to live in. I don't often eat out in restaurants in the Netherlands, but in Krakow, it was easy to get a big meal for 3-4 euros. Also, groceries and other daily expenses were much cheaper than in the Netherlands. I ended up spending around 100€ a month for groceries. The public transport ticket for the whole semester is only 40 euros and I definitely recommend getting it. All the study material was given online, so luckily I did not have to buy any books for the courses. There were some issues getting a student card in the University because they tried to change the system so that exchange students would not get a UJ student card, but only ISIC. I ended up getting the international student card which served me well, but then in the end of December, I got an email informing me that UJ student cards for exchange students were now available. Small inconveniences and problems in organizational matters were quite common in Poland, but nothing serious.

Preparation and contacts with the faculty abroad

I did not have much contact with the University before I arrived, but on matters which required a quick response, they always answered without delay. However, I had some issues contacting my professors and failed to get a response after multiple emails when asking about the content of the course in preparation for the exam. There are a lot of Erasmus students in UJ, so often I ended up asking fellow students for help as we were all struggling with the same issues.

Housing

You can get accommodation as cheap as 90€ per month if you apply for the student accommodation offered by the University. The spots are very contested and limited though and the rooms are shared with at least one other student. Accommodation through private parties costs usually 150-250 euros for a room or 300-500 euros for a studio. I ended up getting a room very late, only a few weeks before leaving for Krakow, which is why my rent was a bit higher. I paid 270 euros for a room in a house with 10 other students. It was still much cheaper than I am used to paying in Groningen and the location of the house was excellent since it was maximum 15-minute walk from all my faculty buildings. Generally, all my friends lived in very central Krakow, and it was easy to find accommodation near the university buildings. I recommend living in the centre of Krakow, because then you can walk everywhere. However, living along good bus and tram connections is not a bad option either since public transport is extremely good in Krakow and the houses 10-20 minutes bus ride away are often much cheaper. I got my room through Pepehousing, but I would not necessarily recommend this website since they charge an agency fee and I heard that many of my friends got a room through Facebook and other ads and did not have to pay any extra fee.

Guidance/reception at host university

Upon arrival to Krakow, we had a couple introductory sessions for all exchange students, which helped us to adapt to the life in Poland. I found it extremely helpful and informative, as there were many rules and laws that I was not used to or aware of. I, therefore, recommend going to the introductory sessions. You can also sign up to get a mentor, who you can contact if you need help with anything. I was assigned a mentor who was a Polish law student, but since I did not have any bigger issues, I did not have contact with her. It was still nice to have a local student's number who was willing to help. I also heard that some Erasmus students became close friends with their mentors and they showed the Erasmus students local places and bars, as well as invited them to parties.

ESN UJ Krakow hosted an introduction week with many activities such as vodka tasting, a Polish spa trip, boardgame night and of course many parties. It was a great opportunity to meet other Erasmus students and that is where I met most of my friends. Make sure to be on a lookout for the sign up for the activities and events, since most events have limited spots that are reserved in minutes.

Culture, free time, travelling and other

Krakow is a beautiful city and has a lot of interesting history. I highly recommend visiting the generic tourist attractions in Krakow, such as the salt mines, Auschwitz, museums and spas. Walking around the old town is mesmerizing and I truly liked the aesthetic of the city.

Poland is in the middle of Europe, so travelling around Europe is extremely easy. I travelled almost every weekend and so did all other Erasmus students. Budapest and Vienna are both only 7-8 hour bus ride away and they are the most common travel destinations from Krakow. There are also other lovely cities within Poland, such as Zakopane, Warsaw, Poznan, Wroclaw and Gdansk, which are easily reachable with a bus or a train. Travelling by Flixbus and train is very cheap and I recommend visiting the cities nearby.

You will have a lot of free time in Krakow, as you probably wish to have on your exchange. There are a lot of events happening in Krakow, from international movie festival to food markets and music festivals. You will definitely not get bored in Krakow as it is a bubbling city with many attractions. I took my exchange as a break from the hectic study life of Groningen, where I had time to travel, spend time with friends and study the courses that interested me.