

My Exchange Experience

INTRODUCTION

During my top-up in Digital Concept Development i chose to study a semester abroad for my second semester. When choosing my destination I looked at both the school, program, city and culture. In the end I decided to go to Ghent, Belgium. I had never been in Belgium before and that was definitely a factor in my decision. I really wanted to experience a new place. From pictures and stories the country and the city of Ghent also looked and sounded beautiful. Ghent is a smaller city and with a lot of canals and old houses it instantly reminded me of Copenhagen and Amsterdam, which are cities I love living and staying in. Belgium is also a great starting point if you are planning on traveling during your exchange.

I studied at Artevelde University College in Ghent. The school has an English version of their website which provides a good overview and explanation of the different programs and classes. I found everything I needed to know about classes on their website. I was enrolled in the international semester programme Module in Communication Management. It is an international program and therefore my class was a mix of students from all over the world. I studied with students from places like the U.S, South Korea, Taiwan, Canada and of course from places in Europe including the Netherlands, Spain, Lithuania, Italy and Sweden. I took eight different classes including English during my stay. International Public Relations, European Media Scene, Brand Management, Intercultural Management and Marketing Communication, Communication Project, Graphic Communication and Introductory Guide to Photography.

In the International Public Relations class we worked with ways to handle difficult communication situations from an organization point of view. We learned about crisis management, public relations and the interaction between organization and society. We finished the class with a group assignment, analyzing the public relations and corporate communications policy of an optional organization and writing a report about it.

During the European Media Scene class we talked about subjects like the rise and development of television, the role of the public, Americanization, sports and news on television and citizen journalists. In this class we also did a very exciting field trip to the

European Parliament and the House of European History. The field trip also included a visit at a TV station where we sat in the audience of a popular talk show.

In Brand Management we were introduced to different brand models, we learned about the advantages of branding and types of brands. In this class we worked in groups on creating a brand video and a brand book, which were different and fun assignments.

The Intercultural Management and Marketing Communication class was all about culture and communication. This class was very interactive. Through different practical exercises in class we learned about what factors to keep in mind when communicating across cultures, cultural sensitivities, ethnocentrism, intercultural values and how all of this plays a role in marketing and communication strategies.

Communication Project was a four-week-class where we worked in groups on one big communication project in collaboration with the Belgian company Tengu. The company brought in a case, that we had to figure out ideas and solutions for. The class consisted purely of group work and individual feedback sessions.

The Graphic Communication class consisted of two parts. The first part of the class focused on basic drawing techniques and the second part focused on digital illustrations in Adobe Illustrator. During the class we produced a lot of art works that all became part of a final portfolio.

In the Introductory Guide to Photography we were introduced to fundamental camera techniques. We also got an introduction to editing in lightroom. During the class we handed in weekly assignments on Flickr that showed the techniques we had learned in class. The final project consisted of a two part portfolio assignment, that had to be printed and handed in.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Among the different classes I took a few stood out as particularly rewarding. The lecturer that taught the Intercultural Management and Marketing Communication class was focused on class participation and for that reason it became a very dynamic class. I felt like I learned a lot more from this class just by the way it was taught. The subject of the class was also new for me and I found it very useful in relation to my studies and future

job situations. The Communication Project was similar to how we work on Digital Concept Development and therefore I was very comfortable during the project and teamwork. I also found that I could use some of the tools I was taught on Digital Concept Development about generating ideas and doing research that helped our process and that was in it self rewarding. I chose to take the Introductory Guide to Photography because of a personal interest in photography and enjoyed the class a lot. It was a fun and practical class and provided a nice change from the other classes. If you are going to Artevelde I would definitely consider choosing Intercultural Management and Marketing Communication and Communication Project. Both teachers taught the classes in an inspiring way. If you are interested in photography I would also recommend participating in the Introductory Guide to Photography.

I found some of the classes to be unnecessary in relation to what I am studying. The European Media Scene class was mainly about the history of television, which I did not find that relevant when studying a digital programme. It was also taught in an unstructured way that made it hard to follow and understand the subjects. If I could choose again I would not have participated in the Graphic Communication class. When comparing the time I spent on that class and what I actually learned from it, it was not worth it when I think about how much of it I will actually use in the future. I would recommend considering how relevant these classes are for you. I did not find the classes interesting on a study or personal level, but if you have an interest in the subjects, they might be fun for you.

PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

I did not experience noticeable problems during the application process. Both KEA and Artevelde was helpful letting me know if anything was missing from my application and I always experienced fast replies when asking questions during the application process myself. I accidentally enrolled in the wrong programme when applying but Artevelde was quick to handle the mistake so I could start on the right programme when arriving in Ghent. I found accommodation through Artevelde. I applied for a student dorm online, unfortunately all dorm rooms were occupied, but the housing coordinator immediately suggested another option via email. I ended up staying in a private home, where I shared a floor in a town house with another exchange student. The housing was not as expensive as I am used to in Copenhagen. I chose not to work during my exchange, on the other hand I also received the Erasmus grant and so I found my budget to be

somewhat accurate. I ended up traveling more than expected during my stay and of course that resulted in spending more money than what I had expected, but it was definitely worth it. I was of course nervous and excited moving to a new country. I had direct contact with the family of the house I stayed in and they were helpful with directions and welcoming me, so I found that everything went smoothly getting to my new home and settling in and there was really nothing to be nervous about.

CULTURAL AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Culturally living in Ghent was not that different from living in Copenhagen and I quickly found myself at home in Ghent, which is a beautiful city with a nice vibe. There is a lot happening around the canals, they are an important part of the city and especially during summer people hang out here. The school provided the exchange students with a buddy-system to help us adjust to the school and the city. I always had a person to turn to with questions and many of the Belgian buddies became my friends during the semester. I lived with a girl from the U.S during my stay and learned a lot about her culture and life at home, this for me was so fun and exciting to experience.

All in all I would say that meeting my classmates from all over the world was the absolute best experience from my stay in Ghent. I learned so much about their cultures and countries through getting to know them during the semester and that is the most important part of doing an exchange for me. Meeting these people also gives me a network of friends all over the world, which can only be a good thing for me in the future.

If I have one piece of advice for a student doing a semester at Artevelde it would be to take part in all the events and fun they arrange for the international students. They make a big effort to make your stay as good as possible. Take advantage of the buddy-system and use them for help with everything from school to staying in the city. I experienced a lot of fun and different things all over Belgium because I participated in all the events and trips the buddies arranged.