

Experience Report

Basic information

- HSG Master: Business Innovation
- Exchange Program: Double Degree from August 2018 – August 2019
- RSM Program: Organizational Change & Consulting (OCC)
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Information host university

HOST UNIVERSITY

The Rotterdam School of Management (RSM) is the Management faculty of the Erasmus University. While Erasmus University is distributed across the city, RSM is located at Campus Woudestein in Krawlingen. The business faculty is quite renowned for management topics. In terms of location, the campus is quite lovely and can satisfy all student needs with a food court, supermarket, many facilities to study and also many opportunities for sports.

RSM has about 7500 students studying mainly management-related subjects on undergraduate, graduate and Ph.D. level. The university offers a range of support systems, for example, one orientation program designed by the faculty with all other master students and one Kick-Off day with the OCC program where you meet fellow students. Compared to HSG, course selection is effortless in the first semester as most of the courses are mandatory. The course selection process for the second semester (electives) is quite easy and well-advised by the university. Computer facilities are easily accessible across the entire campus, some a very busy (Polak Building), some are not busy (Mandeville). The library is occupied during examination time. However, while writing the thesis, it was always possible to catch a quiet spot.

ACADEMICS

In terms of courses and classes, the OCC program consists of two parts. During the first semester, you take mandatory courses for all students within the program. In the second semester, you can choose like all other MSc students between a range of electives while you have to fulfill the requirement to take at least two electives offered by your master program. Regularly, students are also required to write your thesis along the second semester. However, as a double degree student, the deadlines do not apply to you, and you can clarify the procedure with your thesis coach. I pursued the typical thesis trajectory and can only recommend doing so. While it needs some energy to coordinate the different stakeholders (especially if you plan to write your thesis with a company like I did), the thesis process by RSM gives you some structure and deadlines. In my case, it was even possible to shift one elective so that I could be fulltime present at the company where I wrote my thesis. This required some coordination with your coach. However, my coach was very flexible and also quite helpful and approachable for problems. If you don't write your thesis during the second block and you only take one elective as scheduled, you will have a lot of spare time.

In terms of course quality, I believe in comparison to HSG courses, RSM is more driven by academia. For example, reading and preparing journal articles was quite common, and students sometimes had to present their understanding of the paper. Furthermore, discussion about different propositions were facilitated based on articles. However, engagement from students is very depending on the specific course. On average and based on my HSG experience, students are less eager to invest in good grades.

Examination in most classes takes place by using different methods. Often, students had to perform a group work (presentation, report, pitch, video) and an individual assignment was graded (exam, reflection paper (especially in OCC classes), take-home exam).

Maybe also a few words about the OCC program. While one may expect to work in the field of organizational psychology, you might be disappointed. A more philosophical approach drives the program to Organizational Change. The reason for this is the guidance of the academic staff. Many teachers are quite unusual in their way of thinking about organizational change and consulting. Their approach for this program relies on a strong focus on individual reflection based on conducting self-organized projects. However, as those projects are always driven and organized by students, and you only have one block (12 weeks), the results lack substance and quality.

Furthermore, students within the program were quite young and had low levels of working experience. Most of them were from the Netherlands, some from Germany and one from Portugal, Austria, and China. As usual in the Netherlands, most students enter the master's in the beginnings of the 20 (21,22). Thus, their level of skills (project/time management, PowerPoint, and Excel) in comparison to HSG students is much lower. However, as the topic of the program is quite broad, it attracts individuals with diverse backgrounds (Management, Public Governance, Human Resource).

The language skills of the RSM professor were always excellent, and it was easy to understand their English. Furthermore, the academic professor of the OCC program facilitated the use of English as he encouraged students to only speak English, also in breaks, which was beneficial.

In terms of electives, I can recommend OCC courses if someone is open to new and very interactive ways of teaching. If you look for hard skills, don't choose OCC courses. Grades are in general quite good, but sometimes a little bit random and highly depending on the lecturer. Besides OCC, I took one HRM Course (Decision Making) which was quite comparable to an HSG course. Students had to write an exam, prepare a presentation, and write another group assignment. The lectures were well structured, more driven by academia (students had to read 2-3 papers) than by practical affairs. I also took one course from the Innovation Master (Innovation by alliances and acquisitions), which I would not recommend. For each session, students had to write down their given comments and were graded on these. This rule became a rat race and was not facilitating in-class discussions. Furthermore, the lecturer could not moderate critical comments and sometimes even neglected cultural differences (especially Asian). Moreover, assignments were quite vague, and grading was utterly random.

The teacher-student contact was quite relaxed in my case. Professors, in most cases, were open to discuss problems and mostly tried to reach a constructive solution. One professor of OCC even joined drinks in the student bar smitse after class.

practical information

INFORMATION PRIOR TO GOING ABROAD

As a double degree student, RSM contacted me quite early (I believe June), but the master program OCC was quite late (August). Enrolling within the program was quite easy and done by the Double Degree office. I think I only needed to provide some documents (Copy of ID, Picture). Booking flights and traveling to the Netherlands happened by train as I was living in northern Germany.

VISA PROCEDURE AND IMMIGRATION FORMALITIES

In terms of visa procedure and immigration formalities, I had no problems, and there was no registration necessary.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

I lived in Caprelseburg, which was quite far away from the city center. I needed 10-15 minutes by bike to the university and 30 minutes by bike to the city. However, the housing situation is horrible – thus be early and make sure to find something by using your network and Facebook. Make also sure to organize a bike for getting around in Rotterdam. Many students rely on swapfiets where you can borrow a bike.

MONEY

The cost of living is very depending on your lifestyle. However, I would assume to plan at least 500€ for housing. If you plan 500€ for the rest, you should be fine. Possibly if you live cheap, it is also feasible to live for 800-900€ per month. Make sure to have a bank account that has a card capable of paying cashless.

HOST COUNTRY

My main advice would be to bring an umbrella and clothes for rainy weather. It's often raining and sometimes really heavy!

Regarding items, you can get everything you need in the supermarkets. In terms of dress code, I think dutch students are always well dressed. So, if you are into fashion, the Netherlands is the right place. My favorite trip was The Hague and Scheveningen. Both locations are not far away (1 hour by train). The Hague is the seat of the government and has a beautiful small and vibrant city. Scheveningen is the seaside resort and has beautiful beaches where you can go swimming. So, make sure you catch a day when the sun is out!

In my opinion, I always felt safe in Rotterdam and at university and never had any issues. In terms of the Dutch language, it is your choice. I didn't learn Dutch and it was easy possible as all people have a sufficient English level. However, if you are into languages and have time – feel free. Getting access to local culture is quite tricky. Especially for exchange students that are only present for half or a full year, Dutch students like any other students stick together. However, my strategy was to form groups with Dutch students to enter their culture, and to a certain extent, that worked quite well so that I made some Dutch friends.

SOCIAL LIFE

Sports facilities are accessible at the university. I choose to go running along the river a few times during the week. The university and the city also offer many cultural events (festivals, museums, cinema, etc.). In my case, social life took place at the campus as I mostly spent my full day at the university. Thus, you also get to know the different opportunities.

Furthermore, STAR- a student association – is organizing a lot of different things (Pub crawls, Parties, Smitse). I would recommend visiting the smitse. Often, after class, students went to Smitse for a few beers, and sometimes this was the start of a lovely evening.

OVERALL EVALUATION OF YOUR EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE

All in all, I would recommend the Double Degree Program with the OCC program in Rotterdam. However, make sure to clarify your expectations. There are better places for exchange if you want to party and have an excellent time at a beautiful spot with great weather. Also, the university is driven by a more academic approach for studying. So, make sure that this is fine with you. If you are open to that – you can develop your skills in scientific writing, and you will find an excellent environment for personal development.

In terms of personal exposure for new challenges, RSM is quite reasonable, and there might be more challenging ways of going on exchange. As I was mainly interested in organizational change, I could pursue my passion for this topic and extend my knowledge. Thus, it was a fantastic experience and I also made a lot of new friends. Thus, this chapter of my academic career helped me to navigate through my future career.