

**Exchange university**

KU Leuven

**Degree programme**

Programme for Exchange Students Faculty of Economics and Business (Leuven)

## KU Leuven - hard work pays off

### Before departure

I decided to exchange because I wanted to experience a different culture. I chose Belgium firstly because I saw there are many countries nearby so I thought it would be easy for travelling (But I was wrong because I didn't have much time to travel). Regarding the visa application, prepare as soon as possible because some people will go on vacation during summer which may cause trouble. Also, do not just wait after you send all the required documents to the embassy - email or call them several weeks later if you still haven't received your visa, otherwise they will always postpone your application review. Some important documents such as: medical certificate, police clearance certificate, financial attestation, etc.

### Upon arrival

I arrived around 4-5 days before the start of the semester; and the first week was the introductory week so no classes were planned.

### Financials

Usually students can receive Erasmus+ scholarship from KTH which is 400 euros per month. The living expense is a bit less expensive than in Sweden, but you need to buy some new daily necessities during the first weeks and that would be a large expense. During your visa application, you need the document of financial attestation, and one method to obtain it is to transfer some money into KU Leuven's blocked account. The required money is 1400 euros for the first month + 700 euros per month except the first month + 100 euros management fee. And those money will be transferred back to your bank account every month.

### Accommodation

The university provided accommodation but you need to sign up/reply early, otherwise the popular ones will be occupied. My accommodation is called Cruysberghs and it is located in the city center. I could walk to all my lecture rooms within 15 minutes. You can rent bedsheets and towels, quilts and pillows, pans and pots, bowls and cups from the office.

However, it was shared bathroom, shared toilet and shared kitchen. There's a washbasin inside the room but only with cold water. Another annoying thing was that the sound insulation was not good - I lived beside the kitchen and I could hear people talking in the kitchen. The kitchen was dirty, some students didn't wash the dishes in time and they put their private things everywhere on the table. The kitchen, bathroom and toilet were cleaned once a week by a cleaning lady. The bathroom was not so good as well - the heating system broke for some days so we only have cold water for shower. And the light went off after 15 minutes and the switch is outside of the bathroom so I always wash my hair in darkness. I feel so glad to be back and have my own bathroom in Stockholm.



## University and studies

Students in my programme (Real Estate and Construction Management) in KTH can only do exchange study under Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB) in KU Leuven. We can choose all the courses offered by FEB and at most 2 courses from other faculties.

The study pressure in Leuven is much heavier than that in KTH. At the beginning of the semester in KUL it felt like during the exam period in KTH. You really have to study for around 40 hours per week, and it's not possible to pass the exams if you only start studying one month before the exam. In the introduction meeting for exchange students, we were told that usually around 25% students would fail in an exam. Personally I study 6 days a week but not fully efficiently - I woke up late. Also, in KTH it's not so hard to get an A, but in KUL many students only get 10-12 out of 20 points. 15 is a very good grade and almost no student can get more than 18.

I went through a very anxious time in KUL - I was afraid to fail in the exams. The re-exams will only be in August, so if I failed then I could not graduate in time. The courses were already difficult and lacking an economic background made them more difficult for me. But luckily I passed all the exams, and now looking back I feel I really have learnt something there.

The pity is that I didn't have much time for travelling. Before exchange I was thinking about travelling at least to all the neighbour countries of Belgium, but in the end I didn't travel to any of them. During these 4.5 months I only travelled twice - In October there is a 7-10 days break, and all the courses end before Christmas. But Christmas is really not a holiday, we have to save time to study.

## Courses

All the teachers are very kind and very willing to help. The final grade of most courses not only depend on the final exam, but is a combination of final exam and assignments. Most assignments were required to be handed in before Christmas. To me I feel almost all the knowledge covered in lecture notes can be tested in the final exam. So we really have to learn by heart, and these efforts now become my biggest gains.

[DoM36B] *Environmental and Transportation Economics*: One of the most difficult course to me. The professor is caring - he remembered me because I only got 2/10 in the first test and 3/10 in the second... But the final exam is not difficult at all. Final grade = 12.5% tests + 37.5% essay + 50% exam.

[DoO70A] *Applications of Statistics*: The most helpful course to me. A good choice for those who want to get to know R and various tests for data analysis. Learn by watching recorded videos and attending Q&A session per week. The study material was divided into 4 parts and after each part there was a small home test. Final grade = 4 points tests + 16 points exam.

[DoQ46A] *Econometric Methods and Models*: Very responsible and patient professor but personally I do not recommend this course. It's hard to pass the exam if you only rely on the course slides; however if you can gather some of the past exam questions then it would be very easy as every year the exam questions are similar. The problem is that the past exams were not provided by the professor, so you have to find it somewhere else by yourself. Final grade = 100% exam.

[DoR80A] *Behavioral Economics*: The course was taught in the form of learning literature. Every week 3 literature were assigned, together with recorded videos. Those were meant to be studied by ourselves before each week's on-campus discussion class. Final grade = 12 points essay + 8 points exam.

[FoVL7A] *Literature, Religion and Art in Europe: an Interdisciplinary Approach*: In faculty of Economics and Business, each exchange student can choose up to 2 courses from other faculties. This course is very interesting - we learnt to analyse European paintings and literature from a psychoanalysis perspective. The professor is a very nice lady. However, the course is difficult for those who don't have any experience in literature. Final grade = 30% exam + 40% homework + 30% essay.

## City and country

Very different from Stockholm. More people, less trees, different languages. All kinds of delicious chocolates. Beers as well, but I never tried. Bicycle is popular - I rent one for 6 months with 70+ euro.

The weather in winter is awful - lots of raining days and few sunny days. Almost no snow, always raining. Sometimes it made me feel in a bad mood when there was no sunny days for a long time. The good thing is that the temperature is not low - I never wore my down jacket there.



### **Leisure and social activities**

Every exchange student receives a sports card for free. You can use the sports equipments in the university's sports center as well as take many kinds of different sports classes. I chose the Modern Dance and the Ballet. These courses includes the beginner's level, semi-advanced level and advanced level, so you can really find something that suit you most. These are one of my best experience in KUL.

You can also pay for a student bus pass with which you can take buses within Leuven for free, and the culture card with which you can have some discount when visiting or taking part in some activities. There are some students pubs where you can have a drink with a cheap price.

### **Sustainability**

The recycle dustbins are similar to that in Sweden.

### **Other recommendations and observations**

Summing up, my recommendation would be: 1. if an absolute high grade is not so important to you; 2. if you find some courses really attract you/is helpful to you, then KU Leuven is a good host university to you.