

STUDYING ABROAD



Always been curious about what it is like to spend time studying abroad? We have asked a student to enlighten us about all the fun and the difficulties that are involved.

Name: Sanne Vliegenthart

Age: 23

From: Katwijk, The Netherlands

Studied in: Elmhurst (near Chicago) in the United States
Studied abroad from August 2009 to December 2009

Why did you want to study in that particular country or city?

My first requirement was that I wanted to go to an English speaking country, because it would be a great opportunity to speak English 24/7. I'd been on vacation to the United Kingdom several times, so I picked America because I wanted to experience something new. At the time I had just made some American friends through the Internet and I was also very curious about American culture and college life.

I picked Elmhurst College because it was situated in a small town and had a beautiful campus. I also liked that it was a 30-minute train ride from Chicago. At Elmhurst I got to experience small town life and had the opportunity to explore the big city.

Are there any surprising or major differences between studying abroad and here in Leiden?

I definitely encountered a lot of differences. I lived on campus, which meant that I could roll out of bed and straight into the dining hall or library. There were also a lot of extra activities, such as International & Foreign Language Club and volleyball. The classes were at a different level than I was used to. I didn't have the same independence as I had in Leiden. We would spend 12 hours (about two weeks) on a book instead of the 2-hour tutorials I was used to. Each course had lots of small tests and essays and even a workbook check from time to time.

Which courses did you do whilst abroad and why?

Of course I took a literature and a linguistics course. The linguistics course turned out to be a recap of the first weeks of my first year at Leiden. It was an introduction to phonetics, Old English and Middle English. While most of the students were freaking out, I got a chance to get an American perspective on things such as the [x] sound (which, as you might expect, provided hours of entertainment). I also took a course on Young Adult literature, which was taught by two librarians and a course on Medieval History.

What are you studying at the moment?

I'm currently doing an MA in literary translation and writing my thesis on John Green's *The Fault in our Stars*.

Did you enjoy studying abroad? Are there any things you wish you had done differently or had known beforehand?

I had an amazing time studying at Elmhurst. It was incredibly fun to see that many stereotypes about America were actually true, but I was also surprised by a lot of things I encountered. I'm really happy that I threw myself into freshman orientation and made an effort to talk to new people in the first week. I do wish I'd spent more time exploring Chicago. I only went into the city four times! But fortunately I did some travelling after my final tests to make up for it.

Any tips for people who are thinking about studying abroad?

If you're in the process of applying, don't leave things up to the last minute! I had some problems with application forms and the IB group, which I should have taken care of way earlier than I did. I could have saved myself a lot of trouble.

To people who aren't sure if they want to study abroad yet, I can only say: do it! You have a chance to see more of the world, meet new people and return with a completely new perspective. And don't forget to keep a journal or take a lot of pictures, because your time abroad will be over before you know it!

