



SMEAL International Programs Newsletter

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Coming to Penn State as a freshman in the fall of 2009, I knew that I wanted to study abroad. However, my marketing and print journalism double major pursuit didn't leave enough time for a semester-long program. Fortunately, the Smeal College of Businesses offers various summer programs. After months of research, I decided to apply for the Economics of European Integration Program at the University of Maastricht in the Netherlands. I followed all the steps that led up to my departure in June: completed all the necessary paperwork, adjusted my ATM card to function abroad, stuffed two suitcases full of clothes, etc. I thought I was totally prepared when I left the States, however, there was no way I could prepare for how much I would learn and experience in the next six weeks.

I arrived in Maastricht on a rainy summer day. The University of Maastricht doesn't have any on-campus living options, so I stayed in the university's guesthouse along with the 27 other Penn State students on the trip. There were two people to each room, which were like mini apartments. I liked this living arrangement because it was comforting to know that my fellow American students were close by. Also, many of us didn't have cell phones, so being in close proximity to each other made communication very easy.

My new home in the Netherlands required that I started cooking myself food for the first time in my life. Hot Pockets and Easy-Mac weren't going to do it for six weeks. European grocery shopping was a new concept to me. I had to bring my own bags to the supermarket or pay 30 cents per bag from the register. I appreciated these environmentally friendly efforts.

The program began with a week's worth of orientation to the university and to the city. One day, our instructors divided us into groups and sent us out on a scavenger hunt throughout Maastricht. I was on



The Winning Team!

team "Flying Dutchmen." The scavenger hunt led us to the city's famous landmarks and popular social spots. We had to answer a question about each location before we could move onto the next one. I came to realize that Maastricht is a beautiful city filled with rich history and culture.

**International Study
Scholarship**

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European Parliament

This exercise really helped me orient myself in Maastricht and to learn the geography of the city. My team answered the most questions correctly, so we were declared the winners of the hunt. We were presented with a grand prize of Dutch coffee mugs and bags of the famous Stroop Waffles.

The next week began my favorite part of the Maastricht program: the study tour. On the morning of June 27, I boarded a bus with the 27 other Penn State students to tour various European cities and countries. Our itinerary covered seven cities in three countries in ten days. During the tour, we visited five institutions of the European Union. Special presentations were prepared for us at each site, which taught us about the specific role that each institution plays in European Union government. My favorite was the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France. I really enjoyed learning about how this international organization promotes cooperation between the European countries in the areas of human rights, democratic

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development, the rule of the law, and others. We also visited famous European landmarks. The list includes the Eiffle Tower, the Sacre-Coeur Basilica, the Arc de Triomphe, the palace and gardens at Versailles, the Champagne Pommery in Reims, the famous square in Brussels and more.

When we returned to Maastricht from the study tour, I began my three-week class on the Economics of European Integration. The course covered contemporary issues facing the European Union, such as the Common Agricultural Policy, taxation laws and policies, and the common market. I quickly found that the study tour was the perfect complement to the class because, during the tour, I formed a fundamental understanding of how the institutions function together to handle these issues in a way that promotes a unified Europe.

A European professor taught the class and implemented a very different teaching style than what I was used to at Penn State. He encouraged the class to engage in discussions about the material we were covering. These conversations really helped me understand the topics. Instead of just listening to a lecture, I was using my new knowledge to talk about current issues affecting the European Union. During the discussions, I offered and justified my informed, personal opinions on how the European Commission should rule in certain legal cases.

The class was a challenging one, but the amount of information I learned in three weeks about how a foreign government operates was truly remarkable. I was fascinated by the complexity of international business and how it affects a foreign economy from the native region's perspective.

While I studied hard for exams, my last three weeks in Europe weren't all work. Class was only held Monday through Thursday each week, which

meant I had three-day weekends to further explore Europe. I organized trips with my new Penn State friends to visit Amsterdam, Aachen, and Prague. Each city was beautiful and unique in its own way. Walking along Amsterdam's winding cobbled roads within the maze of canals was an experience I'll always remember. We would often come across street shows of some very talented break-dancers and wander in and out of Dutch retail shops as we walked. Aachen's cathedral provided a fascinating view of intricate gothic architecture. This city is small and quaint, but bustles with city pedestrians. Prague is a romantic city with a rich history. We spent hours exploring the famous Old Town Square and the Prague Castle. The sites were absolutely incredible and the weather was gorgeous. It finally felt like summer.

Maastricht is such an easy point to travel from. Since it's at the southern tip of the Netherlands and close to the Belgium and German borders, the city is close to major train stations and airports, which made impromptu excursions very feasible.

Studying in Maastricht was easily one of the best decisions I've made during my college career so far at Penn State. My experience abroad has left me with an expanded worldview and a deepened understanding of a foreign governmental system. After navigating the Paris metro, communicating with people in foreign languages, and adapting to different currencies, I returned to the United States with a new self-confidence. Studying abroad changes how you see the world because you come to appreciate different cultures and develop a curiosity about foreign affairs. Don't miss out on such an extraordinary learning opportunity.



View of the Old Town Square from the top of the Astronomical Clock in Prague

