

Student International Exchange Program

Tilburg University - Fall 2024

I am currently a 4th year student that is finishing up my Bachelor of Commerce in Marketing (offered in French) at the University of Ottawa. For my international study abroad, I studied at Tilburg University which is located in Tilburg, Netherlands.

1. Your program of study (courses, assignments, course format). Add the exact number of class hours per course.

For my exchange, I was granted 15 units to complete abroad being 3 ADM electives at the 3000 level and 2 ADM electives at the 4000 level. At Tilburg University, this is equivalent to 30 ECTS (each full credit being 6 ECTS). To fulfill these requirements, I enrolled in these following courses :

- **Innovation, Organization and Entrepreneurship (Block 1)**
- **Platforms, Persons, Publics (Full Semester)**
- **Introduction to AI 1 (Full Semester)**
- **Marketing & Branding (Block 2)**
- **Organization Theory (Block 2)**

The format for classes is very different from the University of Ottawa. At uOttawa, we have a regular schedule throughout the entire semester, with the same classes on the same day at the same time. However, here at Tilburg University, your schedule is different almost everyday. Firstly, the duration of the course depends on which block it's in. To further explain :

- **Block 1 courses are from late August till middle of October (2 months)**
- **Block 2 courses are from middle of October till early December (2 months)**
- **Full semester courses are for the entire duration of your 4 months**

I really enjoy this format because it provides a lot of flexibility to your schedule and you can customize to make sure it works well for you. For example, during my first two months abroad, I was only doing a total of 3 courses at a time which allowed me to get the full student abroad experience. Surely, courses that are 2 months long require more time and effort, but it is easily doable. Below is a description of everything regarding the courses I took :

- **Innovation, Organization and Entrepreneurship : 2 classes a week of 1.5 hours each.** Regarding assignments, we had 2 workshops worth 10% each that were done in a group, and a final exam of 80%.

- **Platforms, Persons, Publics** : one class a week of 1.5 hours. Regarding assignments, it's a final exam worth 100%.
- **Introduction to AI 1** : one class a week of 1.5 hours and a practical of 1.5 hours every other week. Regarding assignments, we had 4 discussion assignments that needed to be completed throughout the term in order to pass, a midterm exam worth 30% and a final exam worth 70%.
- **Marketing & Branding** : one class a week of 1.5 hours and a tutorial session every week of 1.5 hours. Regarding assignments, we have a group project that is worth 30% and a final worth 70%.
- **Organization Theory** : one class a week of 1.5 hours and a tutorial session every week of 1.5 hours. Regarding assignments, we had in class quizzes worth 20% and a final exam that was worth 80%.

Attendance for all my classes were "mandatory" but they never took attendance and uploaded all material on Canvas. Course format was very much like at uOttawa, most professors presented powerpoints and you had to take notes during the lecture.

2. The timetable (academic calendar, registration dates, orientation, beginning and end of classes, exams, holidays, number of semesters, etc.).

I arrived at Tilburg University on August 16th, just in time for the registration days that took place on August 15th-16th. Orientation week took place the following week, from August 19th till the 23rd. Top Week is not mandatory, but highly recommended - this is where I met most of my friends. You need to sign up for Top Week and pay (I believe the total cost was around 80 Euros). They provide you with a group, activities and some meals during the week. I honestly recommend Top Week because you will feel lonely when you first arrive here, and having a week before school starts with nothing to do will make you feel even more lonely. That is to say, Top Week kept me busy and I had a lot of fun during it - my favourite event was Cantus!

The beginning of classes was on August 26th and finished on December 6th. You have a reading week in the middle of October from October 14th till the 18th. However, if you are finishing up Block 1 courses, this means you will have those exams during this week. There is also the possibility that you will have midterms during this week so it's not really a rest week.

The examination period is from December 9th until the 22nd and Tilburg University offers a resit opportunity to re-take your exams in case you fail them. This resit opportunity takes place in January. Our exam schedule was published approximately 4 weeks before the exam date.

3. Procedures to follow upon arrival. List and description of services offered by the International Exchange Office of the host institution. Registration and course selection. Social activities.

Upon arrival, you need to get settled into life in the Netherlands as soon as possible. For instance, don't slack around and take your time to complete what needs to be done because you will regret it later on... let me explain - since you now have your Visa, you need to apply and go get your Dutch residence permit. You need to make an appointment with the Dutch Immigration Service (IND) to go take your picture, fingerprints and provide more information for your residence permit. The IND office was around a 30 minute train ride away and then a few weeks later, you were able to go and pick up your permit at another location which was also around 30 minutes away. You need to get your residence permit because this is how you are able to open up a Dutch Bank account. With a Dutch Bank account, you are then able to apply for your student OV-Chipcard (which is your discounted student transportation pass) and you are able to get a phone plan. Also, your Dutch residence permit makes travelling around Europe a lot easier. I made the mistake of waiting around for this and it really affected me in the long run.

The day I arrived in the Netherlands, I landed at the Amsterdam Airport and took a train from Amsterdam to Tilburg University. My train ride was around 2 hours long and it was the most traumatizing experience I had yet because I had all of my luggage with me and the trains were so crowded. Navigating the trains at first is hard, but you will get the hang of it. Regarding services that are offered by the International Exchange Office of Tilburg University, if you arrive on the registration days (which are highly recommended), they have students pick you up from the Tilburg University Train Station and drive you to campus. This was helpful because you will have a lot of baggage and you also have no idea where you are. They also had Office Hours at the Student Desk from August 21st till the 23rd, helping students with any questions they had regarding registration and course selection. I did not feel the need to attend this service because course registration was simple enough - they will send you an email regarding all information and it is considerably easy to register. The student association does organize numerous social activities - I only took part in a few and had a great time.

4. Budget outlining the cost of studying abroad (i.e. airplane tickets, housing, vacation and daily travel costs, textbooks, meals, etc.).

Studying abroad, especially in the Netherlands, is very expensive. I found that everything was priced the same as in Canada, but it was in Euros so the exchange rate is a lot higher. I paid around 1 300\$ CAD for my airplane ticket with AirCanada (to and from Europe). My housing was around 3 100\$ CAD. Thankfully, I didn't need to buy any textbooks. I travelled a lot across Europe during my time here, doing weekend trips that would vary from 500\$ - 1 000\$ CAD. Vacation costs can vary because Europe has a lot of cheap flights, trains and accommodation depending on where you go! If you do your research and plan ahead, you'll be able to travel to

beautiful and fun places even if you're on a budget! But I can say that trains in the Netherlands itself are very expensive. For example, if you don't have a OV-Student Chipcard that provides you with 40% off your tickets, a one-way train from Tilburg to Amsterdam will be around 40 CAD. Regarding food and meals, I'd spend approximately 80 CAD a week on groceries, but I would eat out almost every weekend because I was away. I only did groceries that provided me with meals from Monday - Thursday. I also got myself a bike membership with Swapfiets that turned out to be around 40\$ CAD a month.

With all of this being said, you need to make sure to elaborate a budget when you're abroad.

5. Application procedures before your arrival (visa deadlines, documents required for visa, course registration, housing deposit, etc.).

Before arriving in the Netherlands, you need to apply for your Visa. I received an email from Tilburg University in the middle of June regarding my Visa application and I simply had to click on a link, submit a few documents and pay the student Visa fee which was 228 Euros (340 CAD). The immigration process was very easy and I received a follow up email a few days after from the Dutch Immigration Service saying that my application was good and accepted. For course registration, the University of Ottawa needs to accept the courses you will be taking at your host institution to make sure it fulfills your requirements.

6. Address and description of housing. Cost of housing.

It is very very very hard to get housing in the Netherlands! Everything gets rented out so quickly and it is very expensive. I decided to stay in residence as I found it would just be a lot more convenient for my situation. Tilburg University has numerous residences that are provided by WonenBreborg but they are not guaranteed for international students. In fact, once the application for residences opened, it was sold out in minutes. I know a few people that weren't able to get a spot and had to sublet apartments in the town of Tilburg.

I was lucky enough to secure a spot in Verbs (Professor Verbernelaan). My rental contract was from August 15th 2024 until January 10th 2025 and I paid a total of 2076 Euros (3097 CAD) for my entire stay. It needed to be paid in full when the residence application portal opened and this was in mid June. This residence was conveniently located walking distance to Tilburg University. You have your private bedroom, each floor has around 17 students and you share a bathroom as well as a kitchen. I never stayed in a residence before so I prepared myself for the worst but it honestly really wasn't that bad. We had cleaners come in twice a week to clean common areas. The residence itself was always busy, filled with many students and always something to do. You socialize a lot in this residence which turned out to be really fun and good! I recommend staying in residence because you will meet friends and you will always have someone there to talk to. I found that there is a big separation between international students and Dutch students. All the friends I met were international and I met them in residence.

7. Other comments or recommendations.

The Netherlands is a great place to come for a study abroad program! It is very beautiful and such a different life from Canada. It does rain most of the time over here, but when the sun is out, it is so pretty and cute. The lifestyle is very different - you ride your bike everywhere and life over here almost feels slow and not so stressful. Tilburg is a very small student town in the Netherlands which was honestly kind of good. A lot of people said there is nothing to do here but it has such a great balance. It is a great escape from all the chaos and travels that you do on the weekends. My friends and I describe Tilburg as a “wholesome” place. One thing I can say about the Netherlands is that there is a huge language barrier between Dutch and English. Everything in the stores are in Dutch, all signs and advertisements on the streets are in Dutch, and everyone here speaks in Dutch. Sometimes, you almost feel alone and like you can’t really approach or talk to anyone on the streets or at the restaurants – but that’s ok, you will learn to be ok with it.

I recommend that if you decide to study abroad, you have some sort of experience with being away from home. I had moved 8 hours away from home to complete my studies in Ottawa so I thought, “wow, this exchange will be easy”. However, it’s not even comparable. When you’re taken out of the place that you feel the most comfortable in, without your family, friends, things, and put in an entirely new environment far away from them where everything is different and you simply need to figure it out, it becomes very isolating at first. I’d be lying if I said my first few weeks in the Netherlands weren’t the loneliness I’ve ever felt. But, my weeks soon turned out to be the most happy, exciting and spontaneous weeks I’ve ever had.

8. Add a description of about five to seven sentences summarizing your experience.

Going to school in the Netherlands was my last choice out of my 8 choices that I submitted. I was so indecisive about coming but honestly, I am so happy I did. I feel like I needed this time to be by myself, grow as a person, find out what I like, find out what I don’t like, work on my independence, learn new things - overall, just being comfortable with being alone. My exchange program made me realize that I can build a life anywhere I want and it made me so much more confident in myself and the decisions that I take - it really made me realize how independent I actually am.

I had the best time ever abroad, I couldn’t have asked for a better experience. The places I visited, all the experiences and memories I created, and all of the amazing people from around the world that I met are something that I’ll cherish forever. I truly made the most out of it while I was here - I said yes to anything and booked everything - my time here went by so so so fast. I feel really blessed that I was able to do this and it will forever feel like a fever dream that turned out to be such a great reality.