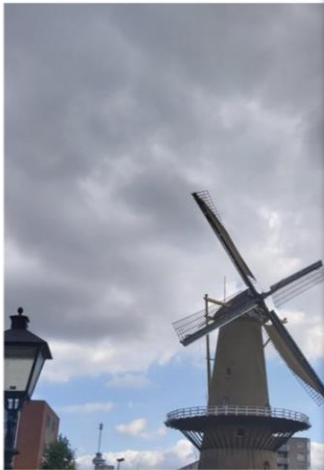


MBA Exchange Report

Rotterdam School of Management, 2019



Felipe Lang
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North Jones

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INTRODUCTION

Felipe Lang

I am a full time 2020 MBA Student. Originally from Costa Rica, I did my undergrad in Industrial Engineering and then went on to work in business strategy and operations on a regional financial institution in Central America. During the MBA, I did the Innovation and Entrepreneurship track and have a growing interest for social entrepreneurship and sustainability.

When choosing my MBA program, Europe was on my top choices, also, while in UBC I noticed how much insights can you get from experiencing different education styles, that certainly pushed towards experiencing the exchange program.

Mark MacKew

I am in the FT MBA 2020 program and I am in the Innovation and Entrepreneurship track. Prior to joining Sauder, I was working in government relations and public affairs for a global financial institution. I have since transitioned into business development for a Vancouver-based software developer. UBC's outbound exchange program was a key factor in choosing the Sauder MBA, so I knew that I was going to commit at least spending P6 abroad.

I chose RSM for four reasons: i) RSM has a strong academic reputation and has a focus on sustainability and business, ii) it offers a two-month exchange, iii) its location makes for a perfect jumping off point to explore the rest of Europe, and iv) my wife is Dutch-Canadian, so it gave me a chance to win some easy points with my in-laws.

It is also worth noting that my wife came along with me for my exchange.

North Jones

I am in the Full-Time MBA of 2020 at Sauder. When I was looking into where to do my MBA, the Netherlands fell on my radar because of the prevalence of English and its potential to be a stronger European economic hub post-Brexit. I eventually decided that the connections that I would make at UBC would be more important for the future. Having not gone on exchange in undergrad I vowed to not make that mistake again and took the opportunity to visit Rotterdam on exchange.

ORIENTATION

Felipe Lang

I arrived at Schiphol airport and then took the train to Rotterdam Central. The next day was the mandatory orientation and I started classes next week. Orientation was helpful to locate the main offices of the MBA admin team, career center, breakout rooms, etc. During the orientation they covered all the basics, from how to print up to how to book breakout rooms. Following the orientation, we took a walking tour in Rotterdam's downtown area and finished with dinner at a local restaurant. Connecting with other exchange students was also very valuable since we created our own community to support each other during the exchange term.

The buddy program was very useful for me, since my buddy was also from Costa Rica. From day one, Adrian introduced me to his closest friends, showed me around, took me out partying and answer every question I had. I'm extremely grateful to him and the rest of the Latinos in the cohort, since they made me feel at home.

Mark MacKew

We flew into Schiphol airport (Amsterdam) and took the train to Rotterdam Central. From there it was a short trip to our apartment. After the first day, my wife and I took a visit to the Erasmus campus and received a welcoming tour of the campus from my RSM Buddy (shout out to Holly!). The RSM had a more formal tour the next day including a rundown of the business program, administrative requirements, etc. I had a class in the afternoon, so I was unable to attend the walking tour of the city and the orientation dinner. Overall, I thought it was a straight-forward orientation process and my buddy did a great job of answering my more general questions (e.g. where you get cheap groceries, how do you upload credits for transit, where to rent bikes, etc.). The buddy system is honestly a bit of lifesaver when you need a quick response to a question.

North Jones

I arrived in Rotterdam on my own accord and attended the walking tour. It was good to hear a local perspective about the area and get my bearings. The dinner that followed was a great way to meet other exchange students who were also coming in without knowing the Erasmus cohort. At the same time, the important information was in the slides and I do not feel like I was at a disadvantage by not attending the orientation.

COURSES & REGISTRATION

Bidding & Enrollment

Course information was sent early enough to make decisions (i.e. spring). We each received access to the course descriptions and schedule via RSM's Canvas system.

Note that RSM has a completely different structure for both course bidding and scheduling.

Rather than choose four electives, RSM requires all students to bid on the courses they want to take. Bidding is done by a credit system where all students have the same number of credits and each one decides how many credits wants to bid for the course. Exchange MBA students have access to all Full-Time, Executive, and Cologne-EMBA courses.

Course scheduling is also tricky. Rather than five-week courses, all RSM's courses are intensive one-week or weekend courses and you are not permitted to take two courses at the same time. This can make it difficult to create a standard course timetable that runs for 6 weeks on fixed days.

Also note that, although RSM MBA students are only expected to take four electives between September-December, Sauder MBA students, are expected to take four electives per period (i.e. four in P6 Sept-Oct and four in P7 Nov-Dec). This may narrow (or broaden) the courses available to you on exchange. Do not let this stress you out however as the workload for these courses is fairly light relative to UBC.

Felipe Lang

I was able to get into 3 out of the 4 courses that I bid for in the first round. Personally, I think the secret behind the bidding process is just considering the course capacity, courses with 40 seats usually don't fill out, so a low bid (100 credits or lower) can secure the seat and the remaining credits can be used in courses with capacity restraints.

I found that the best way to arrange your schedule was to make an excel spreadsheet with all the available courses and then choose which ones work better, because many of them shared some schedules. I would also recommend taking only one course per week, to make yourself available to fully enjoy the exchange experience beyond the academic commitment.

Mark MacKew

I was able to get into all the courses that I bid on in the first attempt. I would agree with Felipe's suggestions regarding course bidding and scheduling.

- **Sustainable Operations** – The professor, Maria Besiou, was on exchange from Kühne Logistics University and had a background in humanitarian logistics. Sustainable Operations analyses the financial, environmental and social factors affecting sustainable operations management, with a specific focus on supply chains during crisis and humanitarian events. I found the workload and the assignments for this course to be fairly light but the discussions in class made it worthwhile.
- **Sustainable Finance** – The professor, Dirk Schoenmaker was previously posted at the Netherlands Ministry of Finance and is Professor of Banking and Finance at RSM, as such, he brings a mix of public policy and business thinking to the course. Sustainable Finance aims at integrating the principles of sustainability (ESG) to the world of finance. It only requires a high-level understanding of corporate finance as most of the discussion and assignments focus on ESG. Although there were some repeating concepts from our Ethics & Sustainability course, I thought that it was an interesting course and I would recommend.
- **Design Thinking** – This course had four professors, one academic and three from a local design studio. I found it to be a very condensed version of the Sauder Tech Entrepreneurship course. It was almost entirely practical and emphasised *doing* rather than *talking*. Some of my colleagues in the course did not like this approach, however I found it to be effective. I would recommend this course to anyone looking to get a crash course on the subject.
- **Digital Strategy (Köln University)** – This course was split into two subjects and had two professors. The first half critically reviewed digital business models and was the first course I took that questioned if/how innovation and technology can/needs to make money for a company (“We cannot have innovation for the sake of innovation”). It was honestly one of the highlights of my exchange, if not my entire MBA and the readings alone for this course make it worthwhile. The second half was an introduction to entrepreneurship but did provide a chance to develop a pitch deck, which was valuable.

This was the first time Digital Strategy was taught at Köln University and, although it was rough around the edges, I would highly recommend it to anyone considering a business development career in technology.

North Jones

I focused on Finance courses during my time at Erasmus. Before the bidding process I scouted out membership numbers for the various clubs and determined that courses with a finance focus were less likely to fill up. This allowed me to put a higher weighting on more popular courses and I was able to get all 4 of my choices. I ended up taking Strategy and Leadership, Mergers and Acquisitions, International Finance, and International Negotiations.

Strategy and Leadership was run by a professor who started a business school in South Africa and was the most worthwhile out of the four courses I took. There was a focus on examples of national strategy such as Korea and semi-conductors.

International Negotiations filled up the fastest in the bidding system and the industry knowledge and experience that the professor brought were worthwhile but the structure felt a bit rushed.

International Finance had overlap with Glenn Donaldson's Risk Management course back at UBC which made this course less worthwhile.

Mergers and Acquisitions also filled up. The joint professors did a decent job but the guest lectures made this course worthwhile.

The level of academics was lower at Rotterdam compared to UBC. It just seemed like everyone was less concerned with marks. This difference was most apparent in presentations where everyone appeared less prepared.

TEACHING

Felipe Lang

Overall the teaching style at RSM is different than UBC. Sauder is teaching students for the North American business market and RSM is teaching students for the European market. However, I feel that the pace and depth is similar for both schools.

The biggest difference is the number of assignments and outside-class workload, which personally felt higher at Sauder. At RSM you usually receive two assignments, one group presentation and then an individual essay due two or three weeks after the course finishes.

One possible explanation for the difference in the type of workload is the shorter course length. Since courses run for only a week (or weekends), I feel that is difficult to assign more assignments. Some days you are in classes from 8am to 5pm and the next days you have class again, this makes it difficult for a heavy workload to be assigned.

Even though both schools combine lectures with case studies and projects, the level of engagement is quite different from one school to another. Personally, I felt that the discussions at Sauder go deeper and are more specific, and folks are more involved (i.e. the knowledge is created from the discussion). In Rotterdam, participation was not as frequent and the discussion was mostly managed by the professor, not so much by the students. Additionally, RSM does not have a "lids down" policy, which could sometimes distract from the discussions (being back at Sauder, you forget how much you appreciate the lids down).

LANGUAGE COURSES

Mark MacKew

Although the three of us did not opt for it, the Erasmus Language and Training centre does offer a special Dutch course for MBA students held on Tuesdays from September to November.

Most of the people you will encounter in Rotterdam and the Netherlands speak near-fluent English, so it is not by any means a pre-requisite to live in the city. It could be a worthwhile course however if you have plans to apply for work in the Netherlands post-MBA.

CAMPUS FACILITIES

North Jones

One of the greatest differences I noticed was the cafeteria in the MBA building. The cafeteria was effectively MBA exclusive and as an exchange student, this was a great way to easily meet new people. At 12:30 when classes had a break, everyone would stream into the cafeteria and fill up the tables. Everyone would sit wherever and it was very easy to meet and start chatting with just about everyone.

I tried to explore the campus as much as possible by trying out different places to work/study every day for the first couple weeks I was there. I found that the best places were in the MBA building because it

was easy to interact with other students and discuss things. When I really wanted to get down to work and not be disturbed, I went to the Law Library silent study area which had small tables and a good décor.

Late at night the campus was very dark but despite this I never felt unsafe. There were several emergency blue lights situated on campus and the city has a very low crime rate which was reassuring.

The MBA building does have a computer lab if you found yourself with computer issues during your time there. While it would be technically possible to get by without a laptop, group work with a pen and paper would be difficult.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Mark MacKew

Like Sauder, RSM has an international MBA office devoted to helping exchange students. This group was responsible for our orientation activities, onboarding us before and during the MBA, and getting us set up on campus. I would give a special shout out to Ana Montanaro who was our lead contact at RSM for all our exchange-related questions.

Overall, I found all the staff at the RSM MBA office to be friendly, approachable and they were quick to respond to any of our questions and concerns.

It is also worth noting that RSM is somewhat unique, in that almost all the students in the FT MBA program are international-students (non-Dutch). This makes for a cosmopolitan environment and atmosphere for the program.

HOUSING

North Jones

The host school provided many resources for finding housing. Unfortunately, short term rentals are hard to come by with the majority of landlords opting for longer term tenants. Since we were only there for 6 weeks, we decided that Airbnb was the best option. We initially split a 3 bedroom in a very nice neighborhood about a 10-minute bike to school. By booking for 30 days or more we saw discounts of 15% off of the nightly rate. It appeared that Airbnb was 10% more expensive than longer term rentals after the discount but we believed that the convenience of booking combined with not needing a Dutch bank account was worth the slight premium.

COSTS/EXPENSES

a. Accommodation

For our first month in Rotterdam, the three of us (Felipe, Mark, North) together rented an Airbnb. Then, given our different schedules, we rented our own short-term apartments. A good estimate for the total expense for accommodation during six weeks in Rotterdam will be ~\$1600-1800 CAD.

Given that we each spent less time in Cologne it was easier to find accommodations. For example, Mark's Airbnb for a four-night stay was \$450 CAD.

b. Textbooks

Textbooks are included as a part of the RSM tuition. There may be some additional course materials/cases that you order online (~\$50 CAD). Likewise, for our Cologne courses.

c. Local Transportation

The three of us mainly used a bike to ride to campus and move around the city. We had two bikes come free with the apartment, otherwise we rented using the Donkey Republic app as needed. We all agreed it was the most convenient way to get around Rotterdam.

The city also has an efficient Tram system and Subway. Like the Compass Card in Vancouver, there is a convenient public transit card that you can upload funds to (~\$1-6 CAD based on distance).

The Netherlands has a well-established train system if you intend to take daytrips. In our time-off, the three of us visited Amsterdam, Delft, Den Hague, Leiden, Brussels, Bruges, among others. (\$ varies by location).

The city also has Uber and taxis.

Although all these modes are convenient, the costs can quickly add up so it's best to use a bike, then public transit, and then Uber.

This thinking goes for any courses you may take in Cologne as well.

d. Food & Groceries (Relative to Vancouver)

Food and groceries are cheaper than Vancouver, maybe around 20%-30% cheaper, depending on what you are buying. Eating out is also cheaper, particularly the Doner, which can get dangerous quick (special shout out to Paradise and Metro Doner!). Beer and wine are also generally cheaper than Vancouver (~1-5 Euro).

Overall prices in Cologne seem slightly cheaper than Rotterdam. Because it is the home to the Kolsch style of brewing, Beer in Cologne will be cheaper but empty glasses will fill up more often



e. Other

Medications. Medications in the Netherlands, like other countries in Western Europe are more strictly regulated than in North America. This can make it difficult to find or purchase basic over the counter meds like aspirin, ibuprofen, cold medications, etc. We recommend bringing these with you in advance to save you the headache (no pun intended).

The Netherlands and Europe have a lot to offer in terms of day-trips or short-term stays during your exchange. There are countless museums, concerts, castles, sight-seeing, etc. so it is difficult to estimate a cost for others. That being said, if you are going to RSM or anywhere else in Europe for your exchange, you are doing so because you have a sense of wanderlust and want to see the continent. Be smart, spend wisely, have fun.

STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES

Felipe Lang

Erasmus University has a few on-campus clinics. I used the services of the physiotherapy clinic since I got a back pain around week three of the trip - I covered the expense for that appointment.

I was told there is another health clinic on campus, however, I did not visit it or know how it operates.

SOCIAL EVENTS

Mark MacKew

RSM's student body and government are very engaged and hold weekly events (e.g. Ted Talks, company visits, celebration dinners). I would recommend attending at least one of these events to get to know your other classmates and extend your network at the school.

Outside of school however RSM really shines. Due to the close-knit living conditions of the students (think MBA house but 60% of the students live there), there is an undergrad residence-vibe. So, this leads to a lot of spontaneous parties, themed party nights (e.g. Oktoberfest), and general sense of comradery that was quite welcome by all three of us and it was easy to make friends with this group.

Rotterdam also has a sneaky party-town atmosphere that you would not expect. All three of us would recommend checking out the bars and clubs at the Kool District (especially NRC and De Witte Aap), the many breweries (especially De Kaapse Brouwers at Fenix Food Factory or the Biergarten), and food (especially the Market Hall).

CAREER SERVICES

Mark MacKew

All Exchange MBA students have full access to RSM's career services centre. I personally found RSM's career services to be top-notch and the three of us routinely received email invitations (and still do) to company recruiting events and job opportunities.

Having access to a European-based career services network was a key factor in my decision to go on exchange. By chance however I took a position in Vancouver before leaving on my exchange, so I did not get a chance to use it to its full potential. If this is something that interests you, I would recommend contacting RSM in advance of the exchange to become familiar with the types of jobs available.

SPORTS/ RECREATION

North Jones

Erasmus Sport is the gym and fitness center on campus. The pricing structure is different from Canada in that fitness classes are included in the base fee but access to the gym with the fitness equipment/weights was extra. I was primarily interested in the weights and paid the extra amount. By signing up for an Erasmus Student Network Card I was able to get a 3-month membership with fitness for 80 Euro. I heard from other students that the classes were excellent but didn't end up trying any. Up to date pricing and class schedules can be found here: <https://erasmusport.nl/en/>

STUDY TOURS/FIELD TRIPS

RSM offers several elective courses that are similar to the Sauder Global Immersion Experience and will require one week of travel to some international destination. I believe in 2019 the destinations for these courses were in Spain, South Africa, and China. The cost to participate in these courses was ~€1000 or ~\$1500 CAD.

These courses are a required course for the Executive MBA students at RSM however they are open to both FT and Exchange MBA students as well. Although we did not take any, the responses back from those who went on these trips seemed very positive.

As noted above, given our schedules, we each chose to take a different course in Cologne through RSM's partnership with Koln University (no extra cost). I would highly recommend taking one of these courses as it gives you an additional insight into the different business cultures and teaching styles in Europe.

WHAT TO BRING

- Passport (duh)
- Laptop
- Cellphone
- European SIM Card (recommending picking up before Rotterdam)
- Sweater(s)
- Umbrella
- Rain Jacket
- Google Translate App
- Any/all over the counter or prescription medications (especially cold/flu meds)
- Euros
- Travel Insurance Info
- Donkey Bike App
- Wanderlust

FINAL IMPRESSIONS

Felipe Lang

The major takeaway for me was watching how two different business schools run their programs. UBC is academically very strong while RSM, which was in its final term, was focused on career development, networking, and the upcoming job hunt.

Being away from your home school allows to appreciate the strengths of the program and identify best practices implemented in other schools that complement your overall experience.

As an international student, having leisure time to spend travelling, learning the local culture, and reflecting on your own career goals is highly appreciated. Gaining this experience was especially rewarding since I personally consider the MBA as more than just an academic exercise, it is also a life experience.

Mark MacKew

I had an absolute blast spending P6 in Rotterdam and Cologne. RSM's reputation is well-deserved as a premier business school in Europe and the engagement by its career services, even to exchange students, exceeded my expectations.

Beyond academics, the exchange introduced me to some of the most interesting people that I have ever met. I am still in regular contact with my buddy Holly in the WhatsApp groups and I now have an extended network in Europe (woop!).

It is also worth noting that my wife tagged along for our journey. Although the course selection process was hectic, the overall schedule and workload gave us ample time to explore the Netherlands and the rest of Europe. In a period of two months, we visited seven countries (Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Vatican, Germany, Turkey, France) and dozens of cities.

Overall, I would highly recommend RSM for anyone seeking an exchange in Europe, especially those with a passion for travel and meeting new people.

North Jones

Rotterdam gave me another perspective to consider my MBA and allowed me to appreciate things I had taken for granted while also alerting me to some areas of improvement. Travel is the great equalizer and

being there at the end of the MBA makes you realize how other cultures have great ideas that could easily be adopted to business back in Canada.

Being in Europe is a great way to expand your social circle and experience new things. I met many new friends in the class and the flexible schedule allowed me to attend the MBA Regatta in Sardinia, Italy. If you are planning on being in Europe, the Regatta is one event that you will never forget.