

Faculty of Law, University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands)

1. Overall impression

I had a superb year!

2. Making preparations

(e.g. administrative matters, finding information)

The University of Amsterdam has a well-maintained website where you can find all necessary general and programme-specific information. There is a course catalogue with descriptions of what will be covered in class, which can help you in deciding on your programme and knowing what to expect.

Tips on the application process: If you are a student at the University of Zurich, you can go to the Kanzlei to get a translated copy of your Bachelor's degree with an official stamp on it. I had to send my documents via mail, but you can do so online now. Note that they charge applicants with a non-EEA nationality a 100-euro processing fee. I completely overlooked this, thinking this was not relevant for Switzerland (good thing I have done an international law degree) and so my application was not processed for quite a while. I received a confirmation e-mail at the end of April.

For the Public International Law track: Make sure to highlight any previous international law courses you have taken in your application, otherwise you will have to take an extra introductory course. The UZH course 'Transnationales Recht' is considered sufficient prior knowledge.

3. Contacts/Responsibilities

(e.g. important contact persons at the Partner University and Faculty)

There is an 'Education Desk' and a 'Digital Student Service Desk' that can answer all general questions. For programme-specific questions, contact the Programme Coordinator.

4. Housing / Finding accommodation

I took the advice of a Dutch friend to find accommodation via the university, so I do not know much about the private housing market in Amsterdam (although I have heard, and you probably will hear, about year-long waiting lists even for the Dutch). I would guess that it is not impossible to find a place if you have reasonable expectations. Some people told me they found a room via Facebook groups, so that could be worth a try. Also, I was told that everything inside the A10 ring road and south of Amsterdam (Amsterdam Zuid and Amstelveen) are considered safe/good neighbourhoods.

If you go for university-arranged housing, you will have to pay a housing fee of around 400 euros. At some point you will receive an e-mail asking you to indicate a price range with four categories to choose from. I found it quite difficult to imagine what to expect, so here is what I have gathered: I chose the third category and got an e-mail by housing provider DUWO at the end of June with a choice of three accommodations (Kees Broekmanstraat, Cornelis Lelylaan, Kranspoor). A friend of mine chose the fourth and most expensive category and ended up at The Fizz Spartaan.

In the end, I stayed in a self-contained studio in a new building at Kees Broekmanstraat for 600 euros, which was absolutely lovely! It is a very modern and rather affluent area. Note that it is built on an artificial island so the fauna is not quite yet what you would want it to be (spiders outside the building in late summer), but DUWO ordered a specialised company and we were spider-free all year round. In general, don't be put off by negative

reviews on DUWO or any student housing provider. I had a very good experience. Also note that you will have to pay water and waste taxes which amount to around an extra 50 euros/month, but there is a possibility of exemption.

Recently, there have been news reports about students feeling unsafe in certain DUWO accommodation (Spinozacampos, Kranspoor) after some incidents took place. Please google your accommodation + safety before making your choice!

5. Arrival

The university organizes airport pick-up days where you are helped with all administrative matters. I do not think this is necessary for students arriving from within Europe. I arrived independently and booked a start appointment with student services where I was registered with the municipality. In general, I would recommend arriving at least two weeks before lectures start, in order to get everything arranged and to get accustomed. Visit the faculty introduction day, the general introduction day for all international students is fun but not really necessary. For home appliances/decor, go to HEMA or Blokker.

6. Telephone

(e.g. costs, carriers)

I had an unlimited internet package for 20 euros/month from Robin Mobile, which I think is the best value you can get. Note that you can only get a subscription with other providers (e.g. Tele2) if you are able to show a passport.

7. Bank account

I know of ABN AMRO, ING and RaboBank. ING is a popular choice. I opened a student account at ABN AMRO because I read online they were the only bank to provide all services in English (not sure if this is true). Make sure to arrange an appointment early on as to not have to wait too long. They will ask you whether you have already received your Burgerservicenummer (BSN) – which you receive some time after having registered at the municipality – but you can open a bank account without it and enter your BSN in your e-banking later.

8. Transport (e.g. from Switzerland, to the University)

Check Swiss when arriving from Zurich, there are often quite cheap flights. Within Amsterdam: everyone will pressure you to cycle everywhere. And yes, the Dutch are masters in cycling. I have seen people carry: picture frames, suitcases, up to three children. Cycling in Amsterdam is so fun, so please try it at least! If you do not want to buy a bike, you can get a subscription bike from Swapfiets (16-20 euros a month) with the guarantee to always have a functioning bike. If you do not want to cycle, you can get an "Amsterdam GA" (OV chipkaart) for around 100 euros/month or put credit on your card.

9. General information about the Partner Faculty and student life

The law faculty is situated at the new Roeterseiland campus, which is absolutely stunning! There are a number of cute student cafés (CREA, De Brugg). I would say that 'student life' resembles Zurich student life, there is no 'campus feeling' like you would imagine it in the US, but it is still nice. Students come from all over the world. You will probably end up socializing with mostly international students.

10. Teaching and studying at the Partner Faculty

(e.g. program structure, methodology, exams, etc.)

The academic year is divided into 7-week long blocks of lectures, followed by one week of exams. There are three blocks within one semester (2x 7 weeks and a shorter third block reserved for moot courts or master thesis work). This means that you will have to write exams four times a year (or three times, depending on your courses). This requires a lot of work during lecture times but it also reduces the amount of cramming to be done before exams. It takes some getting used to, but you will learn and retain infinitely more! In many courses, you will have to hand in short papers that get you points on the final exam, which also helps you to stay on top of your work. Public International Law Students and International Investment Law students follow only one course in the first block, which allows for a nice 'transition' time for when you are just getting settled in.

Teaching is generally of high quality and the courses are demanding. In most courses, there are lectures and tutorials where (additional) material is discussed in smaller groups. Exams usually consist of fictitious cases or essay questions and they are often digital, which means that you get handed a laptop (how great!). The grades reflect the amount of work you put in (which is satisfying), but I have not met anyone who has truly struggled. Grades are absolute: if you get 100% of the points, you get a 10, so your grades do not depend on how other people do. This means that the atmosphere is not competitive. Also, I had the impression that interaction with professors was easier than at the University of Zurich: you can approach everyone and you will be helped.

11. City

(e.g. cultural activities, sports, discounts, nightlife, must-sees, short trips, etc.)

If you speak German, you will naturally understand quite a bit of Dutch, but everyone speaks English. There is so much to explore in this absolutely lovely city, and I will leave the exploring to you! One tip: rent a private boat (e.g. Mokumboot), cruise the canals and you won't be able to get that smile off your face - even just at the memory of it after having left Amsterdam.

Date: June 2019