

THE EXPERIENCE REPORT

Study program:	International Business Administration
Exchange semester:	Fall
Academic year:	2018-2019
Host University:	Universidad Pontificia Comillas ICAI-ICADE
Country:	Spain, Madrid

I GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The University Pontificia Comillas is located in the center of Madrid in between the areas Malasaña and Moncloa. Malasaña is known for its bars and restaurants and surrounding the university are a lot of café's which are comfortable for a study session. The University also provides study spots but these bars often had places specially designed to sit, have lunch or a cup of tea/coffee and work at the same time. The University itself has three locations, I was in the ICADE part but be aware of the fact that other departments have lectures in the other location which is an hour away by metro from the Alberto Aguilera location. At the University you do not have the big lecture halls such as we have in Tilburg. All my classes were given in small groups like the tutorial groups we have at the Tilburg University. If you want to study at the campus make sure you bring your own laptop if you need it because the study spots do not have those. Furthermore, the university can be easily reached by metro or you could even walk if you want to.

II PRACTICAL INFORMATION

The first steps

Before I went to this university I received information little by little. Most of the information was provided shortly before departure. Even though I hoped to receive it earlier this was perfectly in time. Before departure you have to make your own schedule of courses so do not forget that. It was fun to be able to choose courses yourself for a change. In the first week or two you are able to try out the previously selected courses and make a final decision on which ones you want to take. At the week before classes there was a three day introduction program. On the first two days they provided us with information that ranged from where to print papers at school to which numbers to call in order to reach the police or a hospital for example. Alongside the information they provided us with lunch and with a rooftop chilling, where we could enjoy a very nice view and meet other people. On the third day, a city tour was organized and I recommend you subscribe for that one, as you learn about the history of Spain as well as they show you some nice spots to have dinner for example. Furthermore it is a way to meet more people as well.

Housing

I cannot tell you much about how the university helps you to find an apartment as I booked my accommodation before my departure. I liked the area I lived in, near to Puerta Sol. However, whilst being here I heard how other people searched for there rooms and one girl found a really good place on Facebook. I rushed into finding a place to live and this made sure to have a fairly cheap room but at arrival it turned out to be really small and we weren't allowed to make noise after ten in the evening. If you like to party make sure you check or ask for such policies. Even though there might be enough areas to go to in Madrid to hang out, it

is still nice to have some late night dinner and drinks at your own apartment at times. Therefore I could recommend you to avoid booking the rooms provided by the Erasmo's Rooms group.

My apartment was small but fairly cheap compared the prices of living in Madrid, especially considering the fact my place was in the heart of the city center. Compared to Tilburg, where I also live close to the city center, it was a bit more expensive per month. The Erasmus grant however, helped me cover these costs. I also stopped my public transportation card in the Netherlands in order to cover the transportation costs in Madrid. Next to housing, I definitely spent most of my money on food and flights. I really love to try new foods and to travel a bit in Madrid itself as well as in Spain. Good thing is that I did not necessarily had to buy books for the university. Most could be found online or in the materials provided in class.

Academic Calendar

The semester at Comillas started in the end of august, just a week after the introduction week that Tilburg University organizes. It started out with a three day introduction session of which one day was a guided tour around Madrid's city center as I mentioned before. My last day was in the end of December just before Christmas. The two weeks before that is the period when most of the final exams were given. There is no midterm break and depending on the courses you follow you will have midterm tests or not. Even though there is no midterm break, Spain has a lot of national holidays and on these days there are no lectures, classes or exams.

International Office

The host university has an international office where I went if I had questions. You can easily contact them through email but you can also walk into their office in the hours they are opened for students. This is also the place where I got my documents, like the learning agreement, signed. The communication you receive from them is usually through mail, sent to an email address you will get from the university. It is smart to link this email account to your regular one in order to receive information in time and keep you from the unnecessary effort of having to log in every now and then. Also, I have often received emails concerning the same day that they sent it so I really stress you should link the two addresses.

Social Activities

There is a group of students at the university that goes by the name Unity and they organize a lot of trips and parties for the students. Most of the activities involved visiting places in Spain and even Portugal. Furthermore there were some activities that involved eating tapas in Madrid for example. Depending on which classes you choose, you will meet some local students. The set up of the classes can range from all international/exchange students to a mixture between local students and exchange students, to a fully Spanish class with a few or none other internationals. I was in the first two categories and therefore I mostly met other exchange students and a few local students. Next to the friends I made at school I also hang out a lot with the people in my apartment. With them I also went on a weekend trip to Valencia.

Culture and Language

Since I have been to Spain before on holidays, I did not expect to have a culture shock at all. However, living in another country turned out to be different than being on a vacation. I also had to get used to living in such a big city as Madrid compared to Tilburg. There is so much that you can do and so much you feel you need to do that it was a bit overwhelming at first. It was also funny to see that all the restaurants were mostly empty around seven in the evening, whereas in the Netherlands that is a whole lot different. It surprised me how unaware I was of my own Dutch culture and habits. After living in a country for your whole life I expected to have noticed some things that we do in our culture. It took me to live in another country to notice how others do stuff differently, such as cooking habits, sleeping habits, way of speaking, mindset but also differences in economical and political surroundings. What I did not expect from Spain is that it turned out tha school is actually really hard. Apparently children and teenagers have a lot of homework that they have to finish the next day, they

aren't even given a day to procrastinate. However, when I was working with some Spanish students I did notice the "mañana" mindset a little bit. What I did neither expect was to encounter someone who gave me the feeling I was an annoying foreigner. Luckily this only happened on a small scale.

A lot of Spanish people also apologized to me for not speaking English that well, and then they would follow that with a perfectly fine conversation in English. I think they are better in English than they believe they are. Furthermore I was able to have little conversations in Spanish too. I followed a Spanish course at the Comillas University, which helped me refresh and enhance my Spanish skills.

Personal Development

Still leaning a bit on the cultural aspect, of course culture defines some characteristics of someone's personality. Before going on exchange, however, I would think that people with the same culture would mostly be the same persons, but after my experiences I realize that culture is definitely not a key factor in a personality of a person. I realize now that someone from Italy for example can have more in common with me, a Dutchman, than someone from Italy as well. Therefore I have become more cautious on prejudices I have in my mind.

Meeting all these lovely and international people was fun but also a good practice for me in order to learn how other people from around the world tend to work. I laughed a lot when we had some silly misunderstandings when we were using the English and Spanish language. It is good to surround yourself with people with whom you can laugh with instead of people who laugh at you when you are learning or improving a language.

I will definitely meet again with the friends that I made!

III ACADEMIC INFORMATION

Academic level at a host university

As said before, you can enter into international classes in English but you are also allowed to join courses that are offered in Spanish if your proficiency in Spanish is good enough.

Personally I took a Spanish course where everything was in Spanish and I joined with a guitar course where the professor was Spanish too. I took my regular courses in English. The way of studying is different, I would say that in the Netherlands it is more learning from the lectures and doing the test while in Spain there were way more projects, presentations and papers you had to do. Therefore, I was glad I did not take all my courses in Spanish because it would have taken me a lot of time to prepare for all these assignments and I would not be able to have enjoyed Madrid the way I did now. However, if it is possible, then I would have taken one course in Spanish because I feel like that would have improved my Spanish a lot.

Next to the courses Spanish and guitar, I took; International Business, Portfolio Management and Investment, Strategic Analysis, Leadership and Change Management and last but not least New Business Creation. I would definitely recommend all, since they are educative, interesting and even kind of fun. Portfolio Management and Investment, however, was a bit of a mess which made it hard to study for. During my time I also had some guest lectures which were interesting to attend. The teachers are formal but kind and a bit witty. They will always help you when you have questions and most likely they will make jokes about the people in the room. Sometimes it can seem a bit direct and some people take it personally, but you should definitely not do that. When a teacher acts with you in such a way it is mostly because they like you and think you can take it, it is almost never meant as an insult.

There are a lot of different exams given, some were case studies, some were multiple choice and some were a final project.

In order to study for those tests you can either study in the libraries of the school, but you first must register your fingerprint in order to pass the fences that give you access to the study spots. What I also did was meet at Tim Hortons which is in front of the university or you could stay in a classroom to meet with a group and/or study with them or on your own.

Course	Prerequisites	Exam	ECTS	Comments
8352 Leadership and Change management	None	Multiple Choice	6	Many assignments.
8399 New Business Creation	None	Final Assignment	6	Practical and orientated to the world as it is now.
8078 Portfolio Management and Investment	Finance	Multiple Choice	6	Many excel exercises so I wish I knew how excel works.
4311 International Business	None	Written Exam (Case)	6	Usage of case studies, videos, (guest) lectures, presentations. I would recommend this one.
7144 Strategic Analysis	None	Written Exam (Case)	6	Teacher was someone who worked as a consultant at McKinsey.

Tips for future students

I would definitely recommend an exchange period because it is an experience you will not get by the normal study program. If you decide to go to Madrid, I would recommend the Pontificia Comillas university because it is close to the city center. Try to keep in mind that everything you pack when you go, also has to come back. I also advise to start packing some time before your departure instead of the morning before your flight like I did, it will save you a lot of unnecessary stress. It might also be an idea to look into a metro card, it took me a month before there was a spot available that you needed to get one. Buying a single ticket every time costed me extra money and a lot of time in the first month.

And last but not least, enjoy the food and drinks as much as you possibly can.

