

Student Exchange Questionnaire

Name: Yining (Nicole) Chen

Host University: Wageningen University

Semester and year of exchange: Semester 2, 2013

- **Why did you choose this particular university and/or country for exchange?**

According to my criteria the host university should be distinct in the field of food technology. After some research was done, I found out Wageningen University was one of the world's top universities in the field of agriculture and food and it specifically focused on the theme of "healthy food and living environment", which fitted all my expectations. Also, I had a good impression about the Netherlands and it was quite easily accessible to other European countries, so I imagined it would be a good opportunity to explore Europe which remained as one of my dreams all the time. Moreover, the Dutch people were well known for their good English skills. Unlike many other Dutch universities, all the courses provided in the 2nd year of Bachelor and above level in Wageningen were taught in English. All of these meant I could experience living in a country with a completely new language while having no barriers in communications and education, which seemed to be interesting for me.

- **Did it meet your expectations?**

Yes, it definitely did! Wageningen was the fastest-growing university in the Netherlands with more than 500 students being newly enrolled for each year. It was also a very young university. All the buildings on the campus were less 15 years old and constructed with modern and spectacular designs. So the first feeling Wageningen University gave to me was its energy and vigour. They completely accorded with the green image I imagined.



Wageningen was also a centre of food innovation for the Netherlands, and there were many Dutch and international agrifood companies and organisations set up their innovation centres nearby to it. So Wageningen University has strong collaborations with the industry and had distinctions in the researches of food technology relative field. Hence the knowledge I have learnt over there were very practical and useful.

Furthermore, it was more international than I thought, absorbing students from every corner of the world and building the bridges between them. Over there I got the chance to know the first Brazilian I have ever known, the first Iranian, the first Spanish, the first Italian etc, and I was very happy to make friends with them and learn each other's cultural differences, which always accompanied with astonishments. There were even classes provided by the international student associations to teach different languages. Also, I could feel I was integrated and absorbed as a member of big family of Wageningen. I really indeed felt my eyes had been widely opened and known the world better.

- **What papers did you study while on exchange? Would you recommend them?**

I chose the same papers as what the 2nd year students of Bachelor of Food Technology did for their second semester. They were Food Microbiology, Mathematical Concepts for Food Technology, Food Chemistry, Process Engineering and Food Physics. The structure of their programmes could be found on the website of Wageningen under “Study Handbook”.

I recommended all of them. As you can tell by the names of these papers, they were very relative to my major: Food Technology and very useful in solving the practical problems which were prone to be encountered in food industry. They covered the basics of what food technology students needed and the levels of them were mostly appropriate.



- **Were there differences in the teaching methods and academic environment at your host university, compared to Massey University? If so, what kind of differences?**

The structure of a Dutch academic year was very different from New Zealand. There were totally 6 periods in one academic year: for half a year, there were 2 longer periods which lasted for 8 weeks followed by 1 shorter one which lasted for 4 weeks. In each period we needed to take two courses and one course respectively, and each period was finished by the exams of those courses taken during that period. In addition, there were one winter and one summer re-exam week for students to redo the exams which they fail in the past, with a completely different set of questions. The shorter length of one academic period meant the shorter time available to be prepared for the exams, so I needed to stay being concentrated in studying from the start of a period. I also felt having to sit in an exam more frequently than at Massey.



The ways of setting up a timetable was also quite different. Each day in one period we had same timetable: one morning class for one course and one afternoon class for another course. The courses were usually started with lectures and exercises sessions, and the laboratory classes only started later in a period after all the lectures were finished. Like what we had at Massey, the labs always required students to work in a group of a pair or three and group reports needed to be done. But the reports did not need to be put in a very professional format.

The methods of teaching were very technologically advanced. All the lectures could be viewed on live and watched later on an online learning environment like “Stream” at

Massey. There was no traditional whiteboard being used in the lectures, teachers needed to write on the touch screen which would be projected. However, even though most of the teaching staffs were very friendly and professional, they were lagging in replying emails.

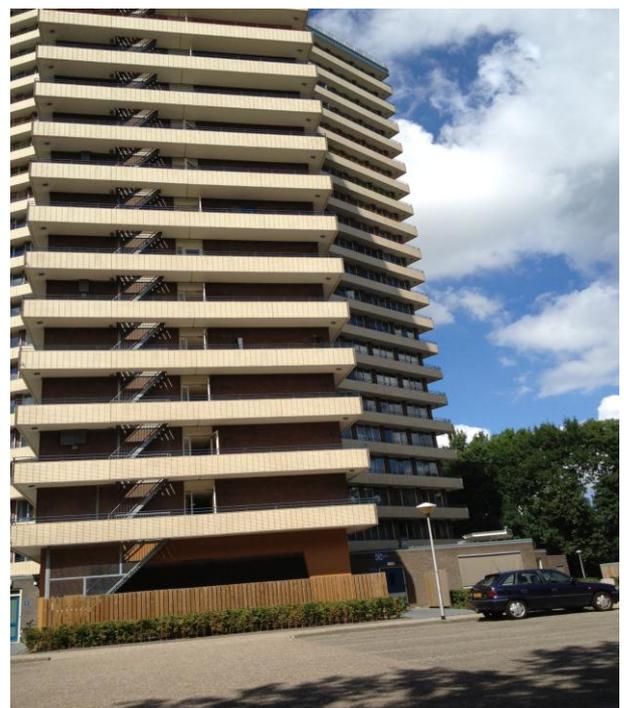


The difficulty of courses was similar to Massey, but the exam questions were broader and more flexible than what I had in Massey. It was impossible to get a high mark by only doing the past exam papers repeatedly, so understanding the knowledge and knowing how to applying them in the practical problems became more important. The marks achieved in labs usually accounted to 25% of overall result of the course; meanwhile the rest was all based on the final exam results. Therefore everyone worked very hard towards the final exams.

One thing I very appreciated was the silence of the library. Although the library was situated in the same building of the busiest cafeteria and there were also computers for use, everyone stopped talking immediately once they entered the library. The whole library thus remained extremely quiet to create a good environment for studying.

- **Did you stay on-campus or off-campus? What was the accommodation like?**

I stayed on campus. I lived in one of the international student apartments which were scattered around the town of Wageningen. They were all 16-18 floors high, 3 corridors on each floor with around 8-11 rooms in each corridors. All of the rooms were self-catered. The one I lived in was only 2 minutes to campus and 5 minutes to the nearest supermarket by cycling. All rooms had their own kitchens inside, and some of my neighbours even had en-suite bathrooms whereas I needed to share the bathroom and toilet with 5 other people. My room was about 16 m² big, with bed, mattress, closet, desk, chair and a stovetop being provided, and all the other necessities and furniture could be easily bought in the shops at town centre or at the facebook group "Wageningen Student Plaza" for students to buy and sell second-hand goods (It was super



useful!). Each corridor also had fridge, microwave, and washing machine for shared use.

- **How did living expenses compare to in New Zealand?**

The accommodation cost was roughly about the same as living in the residence hall of Massey. Some groceries (meat, cereals) in the supermarket were a bit cheaper than in New Zealand. Eating out and public transport costs were definitely much more expensive than in New Zealand. So overall the monthly expenses including accommodation fee was roughly about \$1,000 NZD.

- **What extra-curricular activities did you participate in at the host university?**

I joined AID (orientation week for the new students) two weeks before period 1 started. That was a really exhausting but awesome beginning to start the life at Wageningen because we had all-day full activities from sports games, excursions, cycling around Wageningen to late night parties and pub quizzes. It was one of my best memories at Wageningen, and my entire AID group kept close contacts with each other throughout my exchange period.



In the later of year, I participated in the excursions organised by IXESN (one of the international student associations) and Chinese students association to Oktoberfest in Munich and Brussels respectively. There were many other different student associations at Wageningen with all kinds of activities to play around, like free Taichi and Dutch classes. I also once joined a student choir group.

- **What's one thing you learnt about your host country or culture?**

Bike was essential to the lives of Dutch. They were seen to be used by any age of people in their everyday's life for shopping, work, school, picking up kids and pets... I was very surprised when I saw the bikes parking lot on campus for the first time: hundreds of bikes in various colours and shapes were tightly packed together, and in contrast the car park was only with a dozens of cars being scattered. Every weekday students cycled to their classes and back to home like a group of bees in rush, and thus the traffic light outside the entrance to campus became one of the busiest intersections of bikes in the Netherlands. There were usually specific bike lanes being drawn in red



on both sides of the roads as well as traffic lights for the cyclists, so it was quite safe to cycle unlike in New Zealand.

- **What were some of the highlights of your exchange experience?**

Being able to achieve my dream all the time- travelling around Europe was definitely the most exciting part of this experience. I tried to make the most of my weekends to go around the major cities in the Netherlands by the convenient train system: Amsterdam, Maastricht, The Hague, Utrecht, Rotterdam and so on.



Because it was easy to find cheap flights to other European destinations, I also went to different countries during the study breaks and Christmas Holiday: Hungary, Poland, Sweden, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy, Austria, Monaco and Czech Republic. It was so exciting to see those symbolic architectures and artworks right in front of my face when they usually could only be seen in the pictures and movies. To feel the differences in different countries' languages, to taste different countries' the most authentic dishes, to feel the distinct atmosphere of each city...those experiences were life- worthy.

- **What did you find challenging?**

Outside the university, there was almost no English being used and the inability in understanding Dutch created some inconveniences. For example, it was hard to choose a shampoo in the supermarket because all of the labels were in Dutch. Some official letters I received were typed in Dutch so I needed to find my Dutch friends to translate them for me. But if you need help, just ask someone around, Dutch people are always willing to help others.

- **What do you feel you have learnt or gained from going on exchange?**

I have learnt to live more independently. Because over there it was like a completely different new world and everything needed to be set up from zero basis, so I needed to plan many things in advance and know what to do next all upon myself, including feeding myself. Therefore I was very happy to make friends from all over the world especially many Dutch friends.

Not surprisingly, I have learnt a few Dutch words and knew some essentials of their cultures. My cycling skills got a huge improvement.

- **Do you have any tips for future students intending to travel to the same country or university?**

For the students who are not holding New Zealand passports and need to apply for a visa to enter the Netherlands, make sure applying to the visa as early as possible because sometimes the application procedure is complicated and time consuming.

Make the most of your time to explore the world outside Wageningen. Dutch public transport system you can go to every town in the Netherlands within 4 hours. When travelling inside the Netherlands, buying train day tickets launched by some retailers ('dagkaart' in Dutch) in advance will make the travel much cheaper and easier.

When you plan to stay on campus, make sure tell the exchange coordinator and book a room in early. The room might be run out closer to the start of the semester and you might be assigned to a student housing which is 10km away from the campus.

While enjoying the freedom of living outside the home and partying overnight, as university students please do not forget our main task is studying. So be careful not to fail any of your papers, otherwise it will be very painful to retake the exams during the re-exam week which you could have it as a bonus holiday. If you do not feel like to do any re-exam, then you do not have any credits to be transferred back to Massey, so you have to retake the papers and graduate at least a year later. What a waste of time and money!

- **Do you have any comments on the support provided to you by Massey University and/or by the host university before/during/after your exchange?**
Both universities were very supportive and helpful throughout my exchange.

