

Simon Vandelook: Erasmus Master Biology first semester 2016-2017 Vienna (Austria).

Before my exchange I tried my best to prepare in advance as many things as I could to avoid dealing with problems when would be abroad. Everything was arranged for the best except for my accommodation. Vienna is a big city with a lot of demand for housing, especially cheap student like housing. When the demand is high and the offer is low you can imagine that it is not easy to find a place to rent. I tried contacting as many flat owners as I could when I was still in Belgium but I learnt that the chance is very low to find any accommodation when you are not able to visit the flat or owner in person. Unfortunately I had to re-pass an exam end of August so I couldn't leave for my exchange until mid-September, release of the official exam results. This did not affect my courses in Vienna because the academic semester only started in October, but it made it hard for me to find a room to rent. I spent one week at a cheap hotel a little outside the city before I found a shared flat to rent. I was lucky but the hard work paid off. I found a nice flat in the city centre near to the U4 Kettenbrückengasse subway. From this point on my exchange only went upwards and I had a wonderful time during the next 5 months of my Erasmus exchange.

University of Vienna

The University of Vienna is a big university with hundreds of buildings across the whole city. There are up to 93.000 students studying at the head university. It was founded in 1365 and is therefore the oldest university in the German-speaking world. The oldest and main buildings of the university are impressive by the architecture, art and wealth of the place. The first impression I had when I stepped inside was that I just entered Hogwarts from Harry Potter. It is literally a museum where you could spend hours learning about all famous people who once studied in this beautiful place. I had the chance to study a couple of times in the main library and it was truly amazing. The courses are generally given in more recent buildings where you don't have 10 meters high ceilings and where it is more functional to have class. I spend most of my time at the Vienna Bio-centre campus. It is a relatively recent campus with a lot of public and private funded research labs.

Courses

I was enrolled for the Master Genetics and developmental biology. It is similar to the master molecular and cellular life sciences at the VUB. I had the choice out of a list of more as 100 different courses. The only issue was that my German speaking is not good enough to follow courses in German but they had a fair amount of courses that were taught in English.

-Principles in genetics and developmental biology (5ECTS)

This course was the only mandatory course of the whole master. I chose it because it was taught by six different professors and they each had their specific field of expertise. This course was made to get students with a different background on the same level. The main topics were developmental biology, genetics, cellular mechanisms, aging & cancer, neurobiology and stem cell biology. After 7 weeks of lectures, three times a week, we had the opportunity to pass the exam a couple of weeks after the end of the course. This was new for me. I'm used to pass exams at the end of each semester during exam periods. In Austria they have a unique system for exams. Students get the chance to pass any exam on 4 different dates during the year. Lucky for me I passed the first time.

- Practical course "Übungen in Zell- und Entwicklungsbiologie" (10ECTS)

This 2 week intensive practical course was offered by professor Technau. A specialist of Hydra and Nematostella. We worked in a group of 10 students on different experiments such as *In situ* hybridization, gene isolation, ectopic activation of Wnt signaling, assessing the efficiency of

CRISPR/Cas9 mediated mutagenesis, Visualizing migration and differentiation of stem cells in top-bottom transplanted Hydras. This was my favorite course. I had a great time with the team of professor Technau and the other students. I had to hand in a report of the course afterwards.

- Advanced Course in Compulsory Subject genetics and Developmental Biology (15ECTS)

This was a two and a half month internship in a research lab. I joined the lab of professor Tessmar-Raible. The first two weeks I was supervised by a Post-doc (Bruno). Afterwards I could work independently on my own project. The research topic of the lab was Opsins and circadian rhythm. I worked with Medaka fish on different experiments; genotyping *Opn3* mutants, photokinesis assays, *in situ* hybridization and Injections of EGFP reporter gene in Medaka. At the end I had to give a 45minutes presentation and hand in a detailed report of my work.