

Field report for fall semester 2009

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Class: Separate courses from different year classes

Study program: Bachelor of Science in Tourism Degree Program

Exchange: ERASMUS exchange from Haaga-Helia, Finland, to HTW Chur (10.09.2009 – 14.02.2010)

I spent my fall semester in 2009 as an exchange student in HTW Chur. I wanted to experience living and studying in a foreign country, and thought that this would be a great opportunity to experience life in Switzerland. I had some other host countries in mind as well (Spain, USA, etc.), but the competition to get into the school in these countries was quite tough, and I had to limit my choice to Switzerland. I'm glad to say that it was a good choice, and in the end I would have had no other way. There were a few Swiss schools to choose from, but HTW Chur seemed like an interesting choice. Courses in English were also a big factor in choosing the university. Furthermore, my study program in Finland comprises of a compulsory exchange period abroad, but I would have enrolled into exchange even if this was not the case.

During the first few weeks of living in Chur, and travelling in the nearby areas and Zurich, I was struck by the amazing scenery and the adversity of this (geographically) small country. Many of the small villages had a feel of their own, and even though Chur is quite a small town, there seemed to be quite a lot going on. The short distance and easy train access to Zurich was also a little surprising, which was nice as it allowed me to experience the more metropolitan side of Switzerland. In addition, I was also impressed by the apparent ease of handling everyday business as a foreigner in Switzerland (even with no/limited German skills). It is no wonder people say everything works like clockwork in Switzerland.

Retrospectively, I can say that the most important experiences for me personally were the social ones. Meeting new people and adjusting to life in the Swiss society gave me a new perspective on life. It has also opened me up to new experiences, and a hunger for new and different environments. It was also nice to see firsthand how student life in Switzerland assimilates and differentiates from student life in Finland. Especially since HTW is a significantly smaller school than my home school Haaga-Helia, the study environment felt more intimate and friendly. This is also due to the open mind the students have towards new people and cultures. I heard of animosity towards foreigners and other cultures in Switzerland, but I personally couldn't feel it

in any way. I left back home with many new friendships, with people all around Central Europe.

Now, back in Finland, I can say that the exchange period has given me an opportunity to see the education in my home university in a different light. I, like most university students, had never studied in any other higher education facility, and studying in a different university and culture has definitely opened my eyes to new ways of learning and working. It has undoubtedly been one of the most influential learning experiences of my life. Furthermore, the exchange period taught me to work more efficiently with people representing different cultural backgrounds, which is of huge importance not only in the academic environment, but also when working in today's globalizing economy.

The support I received from my home university was adequate for me to organize and start my exchange in Switzerland. However, because there are hundreds of student going abroad each semester, the international office can't give very personalized assistance, which means problems have to mostly be solved by the students themselves. Luckily I didn't have any major issues, and handling communications with HTW Chur and organizing the study period was a good learning experience for me. In contrast, the small number of exchange students in HTW Chur allowed their support team to give excellent assistance, and answer student's questions very quickly and in detail. This made the whole exchange period go smoothly, and reassured me that if I had problems I couldn't solve myself there was someone I could be in contact with.

All In all, the exchange semester was a very enjoyable time, and I would definitely do it again if possible. Meeting new people and experiencing new cultures is something I would recommend to anyone. I encourage all students that have the possibility to go abroad to study to do it while their still young. This is not to say that older students shouldn't enroll into exchange, only that it is easier to arrange when one is younger and has less responsibilities and commitments. In my opinion, even (maybe even especially) if the exchange doesn't go over smoothly, it is a great learning experience that you will remember fondly in the years to come. I was glad I lived and studied in Switzerland, and would do it again in a heartbeat!