

**KU LEUVEN**

**BRUSSEL**

## **STAP Experience Report**

KU Leuven, Belgium  
Campus Brussels WS 24/25



**[REDACTED]**  
Gesundheitsökonomie

Courses:

European Institutions; Operational Management; International Business; Behavior, Society and Economy; Marketing and Management

## **“ Studying in Europe’s capital “**

### **Description of the University**

My lectures started on 23.09.2024 and ended at the 20.12.2024. The exam phase started for me on 13.01.2025 and ran until 30.01.2025. The KU Leuven campus in Brussels is right in the city center and therefore easy to reach. Finding my way around the building was also no problem, as the campus is relatively small and there are only a few lecture rooms. The building is also shared and therefore also used by other universities. I took the courses Management, Marketing, Operational Management, European Institutions, International Business and Behavior, Economy and Society. Attendance was not compulsory for any of these courses, but I can still highly recommend attending them. The courses were all interesting and the professors were very helpful in most cases. Nevertheless, there were two courses in which more students were registered than there were seats available in the lecture halls. This made it desirable to attend the lectures online from home. I didn't find this suitable, especially in a new environment, as it meant you couldn't get to know your fellow students. In principle, almost all lectures were recorded and uploaded to the university portal so that lectures could also be reworked. The lecture times were between 2 and 5 hours per week, depending on how many ECTS points the course was worth. In Marketing and Management, there were various assignments in group work that you had to hand in during the lecture periods. I personally found the courses much more demanding and basic mathematical knowledge of management and operational management was a prerequisite. As I don't study economics or business administration at the University of Cologne, this was an additional challenge for me. You should also be prepared for a lot of pressure from the professors, especially in the first few weeks of lectures. Due to the university's good reputation, you quickly realize that it's all about performance. Sentences such as “55% of those present here will not pass the exam” are the order of the day. Anyone who chooses KU Leuven should be aware that they have chosen one of the top 50 universities in the world. In addition, in many courses you had to buy extra books and online licenses, as learning material was made available via these portals and submissions had to be made. However, these licenses expire after one year and access to the learning materials is blocked. The price of a book was 40 euros and the license 45 euros. In addition, there is no transport ticket, such as the “Deutschlandticket”, which is already included in the semester fees at the University of Cologne. However, it is possible to buy a discounted ticket for 25 euros in a boutique.

### **Preparing for the mobility**

The preparation for my stay abroad began several months in advance. To be honest, KU Leuven was not my first choice for a semester abroad, but the anticipation was no less. When I received the acceptance letter from the host university, I started by finding out more about the city and the university. It quickly became clear that KU Leuven has a very good reputation worldwide. Unfortunately, important information regarding course selection and semester times came relatively late, which is why the active part of the preparation (e.g. registering with the host university) only took a few weeks. There were also brief phases of uncertainty on the part of the University of Cologne, as there was a sudden change of coordinator. In particular, course crediting and possible applications to the examination office for course crediting should be made as soon as possible in order to know which courses can be taken during the semester abroad. As Brussels is fortunately very easy to reach by public transport, the journey to the new adventure was very uncomplicated and involved little effort. I can therefore recommend green travel to everyone.

### **Finding accommodation**

As in almost all larger cities, finding accommodation is often a problem. Even though Belgium can be reached relatively quickly from Cologne, it is not always possible to “just” look at possible accommodation. That's why I only saw my accommodation in pictures until I moved in. The KU Leuven University offers some tips and support for finding accommodation and there is also some accommodation available through Erasmus. However, places in student residences are very limited and quickly filled, which is why I didn't get any more at the time. That's why I started looking on the private housing market, where I finally found what I was looking for on “Spot a home”. I found a room in a shared flat in the Schaerbeek district. In general, I would recommend living as near to the city center as possible, as I was already living very far away from the campus (35 minutes' drive by train). I would also not recommend the Schaerbeek district (Helmet). Neighborhoods like Ixelles, on the other hand, are very popular with students, as there are many cafés, parks and bars. However, you should always be careful with the private housing market, as there are many false advertisements on these sites.

### **Life in the host city**

Of course, everyday life consisted mainly of lectures and studying, as the preparation and revision of material was a prerequisite. In addition, the weather conditions in Belgium in the winter semester are characterized by rain and grey clouds. As expected, I found Brussels to be very expensive compared to Germany, especially when it comes to fresh produce and drugstore products. I would definitely recommend not shopping in the Belgian supermarkets (Carrefour), but shopping at chains such as Lidl or Aldi. Of course, there is always a lot to discover in a new city. Brussels has a beautiful old town with old buildings and many cathedrals. Sights such as the Atomium (especially at night) are not to be missed. Belgian fries and waffles, as well as the different types of beer, are also an absolute must. Especially at the weekend, you should travel to the surrounding cities and visit Ghent, Antwerp or Leuven. Due to Belgium's location at the center of Europe, trips to Paris and London are only a few hours away and are a clear recommendation. Brussels also has the advantage that you can be back in Cologne in just 1.5 hours and can therefore see friends and family quickly and cheaply. The large Christmas markets offer a good distraction from the lectures. Brussels is well known for its many culinary stalls and Christmas atmosphere.

### **Conclusion**

Spending a semester abroad is a unique and eventful experience that everyone should take advantage of if they have the opportunity. Nevertheless, the decision should be considered carefully, as the challenge of studying in a different language and going to a new city alone can be overwhelming. KU Leuven is a popular university for international students, which means that many cultures and languages come together. I met people from all over the world and made friends who helped me develop my language and interpersonal skills. Brussels is also a fascinating city with great architecture.

Nevertheless, I have to say that I often found the city to be very chaotic and unfortunately also unsafe at times. Pickpockets are everywhere in the city and unfortunately there are many institutions that refuse to speak languages other than French. As I unfortunately don't speak this language, I encountered many obstacles, such as when I tried to register in Brussels. I also lived in a not very nice part of Brussels, where I often felt very uncomfortable at night as a woman. I grew up in Berlin and my current life in Cologne means I'm used to big cities, but Brussels unfortunately pushed me to my personal limits in some situations.