

# Experience report

## Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM)

WS 2024/25

September 2024 – January 2025

M.Sc. Health Economics



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### *Courses:*

- *International Taxation (6 ECTS)*
- *International Economics (6 ECTS)*
- *International Marketing (6 ECTS)*
- *Foreign Trade Techniques (6 ECTS)*

## Short testimonial:

My name is [REDACTED], and I spent a semester abroad at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid from September 2024 to January 2025. In Germany, I am pursuing a master's degree in Health Economics.

## Preparation of the semester abroad:

About a year before my semester abroad, I began preparations. Since I was doing my Erasmus semester during my master's program, I knew I needed a TOEFL certificate. Other language certificates, like the Cambridge one, are also accepted. Because there was a minimum score I had to achieve on the TOEFL, I started preparing about a month in advance. I highly recommend using the official TOEFL study materials. Although they are a bit expensive, they're extremely helpful for getting familiar with the test structure and managing your time effectively. In the end, I passed with a great score, so I might have over-prepared a little.

Once I received confirmation from the UAM, there wasn't much else to handle before going abroad. The host university doesn't require additional language or academic qualifications. Even though it's stated that speaking Spanish is strongly recommended, I didn't even have A1-level Spanish and still managed just fine during my year abroad. Especially at the university, speaking Spanish isn't necessary if you only choose English-taught courses. However, for living in Madrid, some basic Spanish is definitely more useful. Compared to Barcelona, where I did my first semester abroad during my bachelor's, I found that people in Madrid generally don't speak English as well. Sometimes, it was even impossible to order a coffee in English. After a few months, though, I learned enough basic Spanish to handle common situations. If you can improve your Spanish a bit beforehand, I'd recommend doing so. I had planned to take a Spanish language course at the UAM, but it didn't work out for me. First, you're required to take an assessment test, and then you're only allowed to enroll in the courses assigned to you. Second, there was only one A1-level course available, and it clashed with my other mandatory classes. They didn't allow me to switch to a higher-level course, even though you have to pay around €200 for these courses. That said, I heard from friends who took the courses that they weren't very satisfied with them. Private language courses were far too expensive for me, so I ended up using Babbel. It's also possible to meet native speakers for language exchanges. The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) in Madrid offers many opportunities to meet new people and participate in language exchanges. Apart from that, I found Madrilenians to be quite open-minded, and if you are too, it's easy to make friends in daily life.

Regarding course registration at UAM, you'll be informed about the deadlines. It's important to note that courses are assigned on a "first come, first serve" basis, so keep an eye on this. Navigating the online platform for course registration can be tricky at first, but the university provides helpful guidelines and email support, which is great.

When it came to finding accommodation, I took a different approach than what I'd read in previous experience reports. Since I was going abroad with my boyfriend, we searched for our own flat instead of a shared one. I strongly recommend the platform Idealista but be aware of scams. To avoid issues, we decided to see the flats in person before committing. We booked our flight about two weeks before the semester started, stayed in an Airbnb,

and visited flats during that time. In the end, it was incredibly easy to find a centrally located flat (anywhere in or around Sol, as the trains to the university depart from there). There are thousands of flats coming in each day. You really should not worry about this and specially not months in advance as you will only find overpriced offers. Many of my friends who used agencies like HousingAnywhere or similar platforms weren't happy with their accommodations. Often, the flats looked completely different from the pictures, were dark, noisy, or outdated. The price-performance ratio was also absurd. Many of them paid around €700 for a single room in a shared flat, which is what my boyfriend and I each paid for our own apartment. That said, it's common in Madrid to pay not only a deposit but also a fee to the real estate agent. On Idealista, we found listings both from real estate agents and directly from landlords. Most flats are advertised with their base rent, and utility costs are charged separately after you move in. Initially, we were worried about these additional costs, but heating, electricity, and other utilities turned out to be quite affordable. We paid around €100-150 extra per month for these.

### Living in Madrid:

Madrid is a vibrant and beautiful city! It offers thousands of restaurants, bars, and clubs, and the Madrilenians truly love their nightlife. The cultural and leisure opportunities are equally incredible, whether it's visiting museums, theaters, or even taking dance lessons in the park. If you're young, Madrid is the place to be in Spain—I even prefer it to Barcelona. Despite being a busy and touristy city, Madrid has huge parks like El Retiro and Casa de Campo, where you can always find a peaceful spot to relax. Another major advantage is Madrid's excellent train connections. We took many weekend trips to Valencia, Seville, and Barcelona, most of which were just two hours away by high-speed train.

### Academic experience:

First of all, it was standard for all courses to be taught twice a week, each lasting 1.5 hours. This meant I had to go to university every day, which was a bit inconvenient due to the long commute, but in the end, it wasn't too bad. Attendance was not mandatory in any courses except one (Taxation). The campus offers great opportunities to spend time, such as relaxing in the parks, having lunch in one of the many cafeterias, or even participating in sports courses or using the gym.

#### **International Taxation:**

The teacher was American, so her English was easy to understand. The course wasn't heavily focused on taxation but was more similar to a microeconomics course I had in Cologne. It was very manageable, even without prior knowledge. During the semester, there were quizzes, and you had to attend at least 3 out of 4 as they counted toward the final grade. Additionally, there was a presentation and a final exam, both of which were graded generously. I highly recommend this course—it was one of the two best courses I took at UAM.

#### **International Economics:**

This was the most challenging course for me. Although the teacher was German and very friendly, it was hard to follow his lectures. This was partly because the subject was very theoretical and required prior knowledge, and partly because the course wasn't well-organized. Electronic devices weren't allowed; you could only use paper and a pen. The final exam was also quite difficult. Overall, I wouldn't recommend this course.

#### **International Marketing:**

This was my second favorite course. The teacher, originally from Canada, was very enthusiastic and spoke excellent English. He made the classes interactive, though he sometimes called on students by name to answer questions. A minor downside was the workload, which included small tasks, a midterm exam, a final exam, and group work. However, I would still highly recommend this course, even if you don't have prior knowledge of marketing, as I didn't.

**Foreign Trade Techniques:**

This course was taught by a Spanish teacher, and unfortunately, his English was the weakest among all my professors, though still understandable. The classes weren't well-organized, the topics were confusing, and the slides lacked structure. Because of this, I didn't attend very often. However, the two case studies and the final exam were fairly easy if you put in a bit of effort. As it was straightforward to pass, I would still recommend this course.