

NHH



STAP Experience Report

NHH –
Norwegian School of Economics
Bergen, Norway



Master in Business Administration (Accounting & Taxation)

Autumn 2024

Completed Courses:

BAN400 – R Programming for Data Science

BUS446 – Sustainable Business Models

FIE402 – Corporate Finance

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2024, I had the incredible opportunity to spend a semester at the Norwegian School of Economics (NHH) in the beautiful city of Bergen, Norway. Although Bergen is known as the rainiest city in Europe, it has a unique charm that made my time there truly enjoyable. The city's picturesque landscapes, cozy atmosphere, and vibrant culture made every day a delightful experience.

In this report, I will share my personal experiences, provide general information about preparing for the semester, discuss accommodation options, introduce the university and the courses I attended, and offer some tips for anyone considering studying at NHH.

PREPARATIONS

Both the University of Cologne and NHH provided excellent support, making the preparation process for the semester straightforward and uncomplicated. As long as you carefully follow the recommendations and tips provided by the ZiB, you will be able to meet all the important deadlines. Applying for the ERASMUS grant was also a well-organized process – just make sure to refer to the information provided by the ZiB at the appropriate time.

Beyond administrative preparations, there are a few practical matters to address before heading to Norway:

- **Insurance:** Ensure your health insurance and any other relevant policies are valid for your stay.
- **Credit Card:** Bring a credit card that allows you to make foreign currency payments without additional fees. There is no need to exchange your euros for Norwegian Krone in advance, as I never needed cash during my time in Norway 😊
- **Weather-appropriate clothing** is essential in Bergen. A high-quality rain jacket is a must, and durable hiking boots and outdoor gear are recommended for exploring the country's beautiful landscapes.
- **Winter Gear:** In contrast to what one might expect, winters in Bergen are relatively mild since the city is located by the sea. Snow is rare, but if you venture inland, you will experience colder temperatures and snow-covered landscapes (and you should definitely do so). Thus, it is essential to bring appropriate clothing.

Travel Tips: The most convenient way to reach Bergen is by plane. Depending on the time of year, you might find direct flights from Düsseldorf (DUS). If not, Frankfurt (FRA) is the most suitable alternative. I strongly recommend booking your flight as early as possible. However, some of my friends traveled to Bergen by car or train as well. While having a car can be useful for exploring the surrounding areas, you won't need it for day-to-day life in the city. For trips, there are two convenient options: renting a car (with relatively affordable rental prices) or using the excellent train system in Norway.

ACCOMODATION

A significant advantage of being accepted for a semester at NHH is the guaranteed accommodation in one of the student residences managed by Sammen, the Norwegian student welfare organization. This means that prospective students can avoid the stress of finding housing in Norway from abroad. There is, however, a strict deadline for applying for Sammen housing, which is typically done through their website. NHH provides all necessary information in a timely manner. For the fall semester, the deadline was, if I recall correctly, May 1.

When applying, it is possible to indicate your preferences for specific residences. I recommend prioritizing the Hatleberg options, as this residence is located right next to the university – just a five-minute walk away. That said, based on my experience and those of other students, Sammen rarely accommodates these preferences, particularly during the fall semester. Only a few students manage to secure a room in Hatleberg – I only met a handful of students who stayed there. The majority of exchange students, including myself, were assigned rooms in Fantoft, a much larger student residence located on the other side of Bergen.

Both Hatleberg and Fantoft offer easy access to public transportation, with shopping facilities conveniently located nearby. From Fantoft, it takes approximately 30 minutes to reach NHH with suitable bus or train connections. As a short-term exchange student, especially in the fall semester, it is likely that you will have to share a room. This was the case for me as well: I shared a room in Fantoft throughout my semester. I had a positive experience with my roommate, and we developed a strong friendship, which helped us manage the challenge of limited space and privacy. However, not everyone shares the same experience. I have heard of students who faced difficulties with their roommates, and their dissatisfaction with the living situation had a negative impact on their experience in Bergen. Some even decided to leave earlier than planned. If you anticipate that sharing a room will not work for you, it is advisable to consider private housing options in advance.

For a shared room in Fantoft, the monthly cost is approximately €320. It is important to note that these rooms are almost unfurnished. Each room includes a loft bed, a table with two chairs, two wardrobes, and a kitchen with basic equipment. Bedding must be arranged by the tenant, either by bringing it with them or purchasing it locally. I recommend IKEA or JYSK, both of which are easily accessible via public transport. Additionally, some kitchen utensils, such as pots and pans, may need to be replaced or purchased, as the provided items are often in poor condition.

With these considerations in mind, staying in Sammen housing can be a manageable and cost-effective option for exchange students. However, it's important to be prepared for the possibility of sharing a room and making a few extra purchases to settle in comfortably.

FIRST DAYS IN BERGEN

I scheduled my arrival in Bergen to ensure I would be present for the Welcome Week. During my initial days in the city, I addressed the matter of settling into my room, which entailed procuring essentials such as kitchen utensils and bedding. For navigating the public transportation system in Bergen, I strongly recommend downloading the Skys app already before heading to Bergen:

- Skys Billett – For purchasing tickets: I opted for monthly passes at the discounted student rate.
- Skys Reise: For checking timetables and planning routes.
- A Zone 1 ticket allows access to all public transportation in and around Bergen, which is incredibly convenient.

As previously stated, I strongly encourage you to participate in Welcome Week. This event presents a valuable opportunity to familiarize yourself with NHH, explore the city, and establish initial connections. Many of the friendships I formed during the initial days persisted throughout the entire semester (and beyond 😊). For other tasks you will need to complete during your first few days, I recommend attending the university's orientation sessions. NHH provides all essential information, and you can also find a helpful guide on their website under the "Finally on Campus" section, which is located at the bottom of the page (<https://www.nhh.no/en/for-students/international-opportunities/exchange/incoming-exchange/>). The Welcome Week and initial days are an ideal time to settle in, meet people, and get started on your semester in Bergen.

THE UNIVERSITY – NORWEGIAN SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS (NHH)

NHH is Norway's leading university for business and economics, and this reputation is reflected in the people who study there. Students at NHH are exceptionally ambitious and dedicated to their studies. The university as a whole is very modern and forward-thinking. This is evident not only in its buildings and infrastructure but also in its teaching methods and the variety of courses offered. More precisely, NHH offers a wide variety of courses across a broad spectrum of subjects, as detailed in the module catalogue, accessible on the university's website (<https://www.nhh.no/en/for-students/courses/all-masters-courses/>).

The teaching style at NHH differs significantly from what I was used to back home: classes are generally more interactive and include a lot of group work. Some courses even have mandatory attendance, and you're required to complete various tasks throughout the semester to qualify for the final exam.

NHH employs a variety of exam formats, including:

- **School Exams:** These exams are administered on campus and can be written digitally on your own computer or on paper (common for finance courses). These exams typically last between three and six hours (you may need to spend the full amount of time on most of the exams).
- **Take-Home Exams:** These exams can span several days, typically 2–3 days.
- **Basic Papers:** Some courses replace traditional exams with written assignments.

When picking my classes, I thought about a few things. First, I considered my personal interest in the subject. I also looked at whether the course had mandatory attendance, and I tried to avoid courses with such requirements (to be flexible for travel ☺). I also checked for the type and number of assignments required during the semester and the format of the final exam. All this information is readily available in the module catalogue, making it easy to plan your semester effectively. Please note: the final module handbook will probably not be available far in advance (compared to the start of the semester). I therefore only completed my learning agreement and course selection on site (also after looking at different course options in the first week). The flexibility and diversity of courses at NHH, combined with its engaging teaching methods, made for a highly enriching academic experience.

COURSE SELECTION

In detail, I decided for the following courses.

BAN400 – R Programming for Data Science

This was, without a doubt, the best course I took at NHH. Prior to enrolling, I had no coding experience at all, which wasn't an issue since the course is designed specifically for beginners. The course was an excellent blend of foundational knowledge and more advanced, specialized topics. The first part focused on a basic introduction to R, while the second part delved into more complex applications. What stood out to me was how closely the topics were tied to real-world scenarios. Everything we learned felt practical and relevant, whether for future academic pursuits or professional use. The teaching approach was also commendable. Both instructors did an excellent job of making the material engaging and accessible.

Weekly Assignments

One thing to note is the weekly assignments. While some were fairly demanding, they served as a great preparation for the final exam. Tackling these assignments in study groups or with friends made them much more manageable and even enjoyable. To be eligible to take the final exam, you have to pass several of these weekly assignments (but not all of them).

Final Exam

The final exam was a six-hour school exam, and to perform well, you needed to invest time in practicing coding. Getting comfortable with R through consistent practice was essential to succeeding in the course.

Recommendation

I'd highly recommend this course to anyone interested in learning to code. It provides a solid foundation in R, introduces practical skills, and prepares you well for both exams and real-world applications. Whether you're new to coding or looking for a structured way to start, this course is an excellent choice.

BUS446 – Sustainable Business Models

This course focuses on how companies can achieve greater sustainability by transforming their entire business models, rather than simply making incremental changes to individual products. It delves into various theoretical concepts that underpin such transformations, offering a comprehensive understanding of sustainable practices.

Mid-Term Assignment

To qualify for the final exam, you must complete a group-based mid-term assignment, graded on a pass/fail basis. This assignment is an excellent preparation for the final exam, as both tasks involve applying the learned concepts to make a company's operations more sustainable.

Final Exam

The final exam is a six-hour school exam. The course is structured in a way that makes the exam relatively manageable, provided you dedicate a fair amount of effort to studying. In fact, during my semester, there were no failing grades (E or F), which speaks to the accessibility of the material and exam.

Ideal for Exchange Students

I would highly recommend this course to exchange students for several reasons: (1) No mandatory attendance: All sessions are recorded, allowing you to review and study the material at your own pace/at a point in time that fits into your schedule. (2) Minimal workload during the semester: Apart from the single mid-term assignment, there are no additional requirements. (3) Manageable final exam: With a reasonable level of preparation, the exam is straightforward to pass.

Overall, BUS446 – Sustainable Business Models is an excellent choice for students interested in sustainability and looking for a well-balanced course with practical applications.

FIE402 – Corporate Finance

FIE402 is a foundational finance course at the master's level, ideal for those looking to build a solid understanding of corporate finance principles.

Workload and Exam

The course requires minimal effort during the semester, making it manageable alongside other commitments. The final exam was fair and straightforward, provided you invest a reasonable amount of preparation beforehand (I studied 7ish days and got an a fairly good grade).

Recommendation

This course is a great option for students seeking a basic yet comprehensive introduction to corporate finance without an overwhelming workload. It's particularly suitable for those balancing multiple courses or extracurricular activities.

LIFE IN BERGEN

Bergen is a city that perfectly balances the advantages of a “big” city (at least by Norwegian standards 😊) with close proximity to Norway's stunning natural landscapes.

Urban Life

Bergen offers everything you'd expect from a vibrant city: cozy cafes, lively bars, bustling clubs, and serene parks. While alcohol can be expensive, long evenings and nights out are still very much part of the experience. For students looking for affordable drinks and great atmosphere, I highly recommend Hector's Hybel and Kjuagutt. If you're a coffee enthusiast or need a co-working space for weekends, check out the Bergen Coffee Roastery. They serve excellent coffee and delicious cakes in a cozy environment.

Exploring Nature

Equally as important as the city life is Bergen's unparalleled access to nature. The city is surrounded by seven hills, offering plenty of hiking opportunities right at your doorstep. If you're seeking more adventurous activities, you can take the train inland for cabin or glacier hikes. The breathtaking views and peaceful surroundings make every excursion worthwhile. On sunny days, consider a swim in the fjord! I recommend Helleneset in the north of the city or Sandviken Sjøbad, conveniently located near the university. Even on rainy days, which Bergen is famous for, the city retains its charm. With the right gear, you can still enjoy the outdoors – just like the locals do!

Staying Active

For fitness enthusiasts, I recommend getting a Sammen gym membership. This allows you access to several gyms across Bergen (including ones at the university and Fantoft) and a variety of classes.

I particularly enjoyed SUP Yoga! The membership also grants free entry to swimming pools, making it a great value for students.

Joining Student Activities

If you're into sports, you can try joining one of the university's teams. Many of them hold tryouts during the first weeks of the semester. While my attempt to join the padel team wasn't successful (they don't usually accept one-semester exchange students), there are better chances with other teams like beach volleyball or handball. Just keep in mind that Norwegians often switch to their native language during social events, especially in the evenings.

Final Thoughts on Bergen

Despite its reputation for rain, Bergen has plenty of sunny days where the city shines in all its beauty. Even in the rain, with the right mindset and clothing, you can still enjoy everything Bergen has to offer. This blend of urban life, natural wonders, and a welcoming student community makes Bergen an unforgettable place to live and study.

TRAVELS

During my time in Bergen, I had the opportunity to not only explore the city itself but also travel to various destinations across Norway. One of the absolute highlights of my time in Norway was a trip to the Lofoten Islands, which is one of the most beautiful places I have ever been to. The stunning landscapes, rugged mountains, and crystal-clear waters were truly magical. Another highly recommended trip was to Tromsø. We went on a whale-watching tour there and had the incredible experience of seeing orcas and humpback whales in the wild – such an unforgettable experience!

Closer to Bergen, there were also some amazing destinations worth exploring. I went on several hiking trips to DNT cabins, as well as glacier hikes in Folgefonna National Park. Additionally, spending weekends in cozy AirBnB right by the fjord was a perfect way to enjoy the tranquility of Norway's nature. In early December, we took a ski trip to Voss and Myrkdalen, which was another memorable adventure. A helpful tip: with a Norwegian phone number, you can borrow equipment for outdoor activities—such as hiking gear or winter sports equipment—free of charge through BUA.

However, I would also recommend taking the time to simply enjoy Bergen on some weekends. There's so much to explore in and around the city, and it's nice to have some relaxing days to soak it all in.

CONCLUSION

In summary, my time in Bergen was an extraordinary experience that far exceeded my expectations. The combination of a new learning environment at NHH and the forward-thinking nature of Norway as a country was simply phenomenal. If I had to make the decision again, Norway and NHH would undoubtedly be at the top of my list. I can confidently say that you will not regret applying to NHH! If you have any questions or need further information, feel free to reach out to me at the email address provided on the cover page. Cheers!