

Final reflections

Hello all! It's me, Kate the blogger, but this time I am writing my final blog about being an international student in Amsterdam at the VU. This is a very difficult blog for me to write since, quoted from my previous blog, "I have never liked the word 'final,'" and this is even more true now because it means my blogging for VU Amsterdam is coming to some sort of an end. It has taken me forever to write this (seriously ask Kelly and Ilin¹) because I have been subconsciously delaying sending the email containing this final blog, but here I go!

First of all, I feel the need to give some updates on my worries I wrote about during my final weeks in Amsterdam blog.

- **Updates on worries 1-4** (overwhelmed about packing, final hugs/goodbyes, passing classes, and reality slap)
 - Thankfully, I fit all of my things in my suitcases! I was really proud of myself because I squished SO many things into those bags. When I first opened them after the plane ride stuff literally spilled out of them, and I realized the zipper on my smallest suitcase broke... RIP suitcase.
 - I completed 98% of my hugs and goodbyes, which is another success! I had some really amazing nights out with my friends which I will remember forever and those had lots of hugs. I am sad because there are a select few people who I didn't see and probably will never see again. I blame this on finals because a lot of my friends (the really good students) were trapped inside studying. I wish that finals were two weeks prior to our departure dates so I could've hugged everyone instead of only the 98%. My heart goes out to them and I hope they had wonderful final weeks!
 - Passing my classes. Unfortunately this didn't go as well as I planned. I didn't pass all of my classes which was really upsetting to me at first since I have NEVER failed an exam, let alone a class, in my life. But then I held my head high and reminded myself that I learned so much more in many other ways: I learned about the Dutch culture, I learned about a new way of life, and I learned about the lives of many other people. These were silent lessons that taught me so much more than any lecture could, and I appreciate them the most (but I'm still sad I failed).
 - I think the reality slap was the hardest aspect to deal with out of these first four worries. Failing was a big part of the slap, following with the fact that I am now back in hectic, loud, smelly New York City (I swear it's amazing though). Looking back at my time in Amsterdam has been challenging for me, and it still doesn't feel real that I am back in Brooklyn. I have certain days where I wake up and think I'm at Uilenstede, and want to make plans with my friends to go to Leidseplein, or hop on my bike and explore the city. I really can't dwell on these feelings too much or I start to feel really sad, then eat too much ice cream and then get mad at myself; it's a vicious cycle.

¹ If you don't know who Kelly and Ilin are, go read my previous blogs.

- **Updates on worries number 5-7** (running out of time, leaving my Amsterdam life and moments behind)
 - Dealing with the clock ticking and time running out was STRESSFUL. I can safely say I utilized all of my seconds/minutes/hours wisely and was able to do everything I wanted to do before I left. I did not sleep much, but I did not crash either!
 - Honestly, leaving my Amsterdam way of life wasn't as hard for me as I expected it to be. I am an adaptable person and I quickly morphed back into my NYC way of life, but that's not to say I'm not sad about it. I think about the little things I would do there often like riding my bike everywhere, being so close to my good friends, and eating amazing food. I cannot ride a bike here because it's super dangerous, all of my friends are scattered throughout the city/country/world, and the beef, bread, and cheese here suck.
 - While leaving the Amsterdam way of life was okay, leaving the moments behind was pretty brutal for me. I am an extremely emotional person when it comes to relationships with people and places, so I am still dealing with the effects of leaving. When I first left, I spoke to my friends daily, and now I only speak to them every so often. Everyone has jumped back into their separate lives now and it's hard to deal with knowing it's going to be a long time until I see my friends again (if I even do (sad I know)) and create more moments with them.
- **Updates on worries 8 and 9** (thank yous and remembering everything)
 - I kind of wimped out on my thank yous for two reasons: I didn't want people to think I was a nerd and it just made me too sad. I don't want to talk about it. I have decided I am going to write everyone letters though! So look out for them friends!
 - Thanks to modern technology, I have felt more secure about remembering everything from my time in Amsterdam. There have been so many pictures floating around text messages, Facebook, and Instagram that it would be impossible for me to forget most things. I also bought two disposable cameras for my last two weeks, and rode around and took pictures of everything during my free time. I never had a chance to journal but I have faith in my hippocampus (the part of your brain where memories are stored).
- **Update on worry number 10** (tying up loose ends)
 - This one is still processing. In my last blog I said, "I am a very emotional person and love people, so I take people's impact on me and my impacts on people very seriously. I have always believed that every person I have had a conversation with (for more than ten minutes) has changed my life in some way, either big or small, and want to do the same for others", sorry that was long. I think my expectations were too high for this one, not in a bad way, but it was irrational for me to go around to all of my friends and ask if I changed their lives, and tell them they changed mine. That would be quite dramatic and conceited. My goal is to incorporate this into my letters and relay how all of them changed my life. The only thing that matters to me is that they know! I owe it to them.

Looking back, I know I made the right choice by going to Amsterdam and the VU. After I got accepted I went through periods where I was doubtful and scared of being thrown into a place where I knew nothing and nobody. Who would've thought that I would make close friends, buy a bike (and ride it to IKEA), dance around until 08:00 (sorry mom), fall in love (that's what I say when it's not love), and gain ten pounds?? Not me! Looking back, I am thankful that I was set up at Uilenstede because that's where I found all of my buddies. I'm glad I got a great workout while biking to IKEA solely for the Swedish meatballs. I'm proud that I danced all night instead of sleeping a full eight hours. I am sad nothing ever happened with the like of my life (I'm kind of kidding) and I am really pissed I gained that weight, but every sip of beer and bite of food was worth it. Looking back I wouldn't change a thing that happened in my life from August 17th, 2016 to December 29th, 2016. Except for the part where my bike got stolen, I'm still bitter about that. Looking back, Amsterdam contains some of the happiest moments of my life and I hope everyone else can say the same.

Finally, I would like to give a shout out to Kelly, Ilin, and the VU! That's the whole reason why I went to Amsterdam in the first place. The application process, the school experience, and all of the social events went so smoothly and I had tons of fun. The VU Semester in Amsterdam program changed my life, and I highly recommend this experience to anyone who is reading this because they are interested in applying. Do it! You will not be disappointed! I just want to express that I am so so so so grateful for my adventures in Amsterdam. I am grateful that I participated in an opportunity most people aren't able to have, I am grateful that I. I feel like this part of my life has made me grow so much because I was able to immerse myself in an awesome European city, and I have met people I wouldn't have met otherwise. Until next time! I love you Amsterdam and friends!

-Kate Jahnsen
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