

## Academic Impressions of VU



### **A Difficult, But Rewarding, Experience**

My university career has been one of the most difficult and rewarding journeys I have ever experienced in my life. And when I say university life is difficult, I am confident that roughly 99% of the students and former students of university reading this blog can relate to that statement. The four years I attended at my old university in Canada were comprised of long hours in the library studying for tests, pulling all-nighters writing research essays, and perhaps hundreds of hours spent in the classroom listening to wise old professors lecturing about random academic subjects.

Earning my degree was of course a rewarding experience that I'll continue to cherish, but when I graduated in 2015 I told myself that I was going to give my aching brain a nice long break from university life. So if you were to get in a time machine and travel back to the year 2015 and ask me if I had plans to return to university I would have politely told you the following...

*“HELL NO! Well... Maybe... Actually ya, I probably will... But if I do, it wouldn't be in Canada. Maybe somewhere in Europe?”* (This is an actual quote that I said by the way)

So at the time I was enjoying my time out of University. No more homework, no more tests, and no more lectures. I was finally free from the confines of the classroom! However, there's no denying that life works in mysterious ways. Fast-forward two years and, low and behold, I have found myself back in the classroom. And just like I predicted two years ago, my new school is located in Europe at the Vrije Universiteit in the city of Amsterdam!

Life at the VU has certainly helped reframe my views about the pursuit of higher education. Everything from the way the courses are structured to the way they are instructed. Even the students I sit in class with have made quite the academic impression upon me. In this blog, I will explain how these three things have created within me a hunger to learn and grow as much as humanly possible.

## **VU Observations**

For those of you who don't know, or (even worse!) don't read my blog (shame on you!!!), I am taking the Business Administration Minor here at the VU. My course structure for the first period is comprised of two classes, which are Foundations of Business Administration and Business Model Innovation. I originally come from a Humanities educational background with no real business educational background. So, needless to say, I was very nervous for my first two classes of the period. But luckily the Semester in Amsterdam International Officer Kelly, with her melodic and soothing voice, assured me that the program was very well structured for new students hoping to learn more about business. So with those words of encouragement I arrived nice and early for my first day of classes.

All of my classes reside within VU's main building, the Hoofdgebouw. It is one of many large buildings on campus and stands tall at 16 stories! I have many fitness goals this year so part of my routine is to take the stairs to all of my classes instead of the elevator. So on that first day of school I was certainly sweating and panting heavily as I walked up to the 13<sup>th</sup> floor.

The first thing I noticed about my courses was that the class sizes were small and intimate. The second thing I observed was that native English speakers were a considerable minority. This didn't upset me at all because, as I have mentioned in previous blogs, I plan on becoming fluent in the Dutch language. Students immediately assumed that I was Dutch so I got to flex my Dutch speaking muscles. Which was awesome for me!

Something that fills me with Hulk level rage is that the desks were extremely uncomfortable! They are the type of desks that really encourage perfect posture and force the students to sit at full attention by making it impossible to slouch. The

backrests are a perfect 90-degree angle and the desktops fold down, essentially locking you in like a roller coaster ride. If you are sitting in the middle of the row and have to pee, prepare to hold it in because it is absolutely impossible to leave the classroom without drawing attention to yourself! And unlike roller coasters, putting your hands up in the air doesn't make these desks more fun to sit in. So you are basically trapped in class by these desks and, with no chance of escape, you have no choice but to pay close attention to the lesson! Whoever created these desks is a diabolical genius!

Well-played VU... well played...



## **Interaction and Discussion**

Something that I am a huge fan of is that the classes at the VU are extremely interactive. A fact that I was neither expecting nor prepared for. On the first day of classes my FBA professor picked me out in the crowd and asked me to give an example of a franchise. I was completely caught off guard and instead of providing an obvious answer like McDonalds or Albert Heijn, I panicked and shouted "COCA COLA!" The confused look on the professor's face said more than words ever could. It wasn't the greatest start to my classes, but it made me realize that I was going to have to really be focused and be prepared to interact with my fellow humans. This first awkward interaction set the tone for the rest of the period.

Discussion amongst students and professors is highly encouraged here at the VU. Courses are structured in such a way that they help turn students into critical thinkers. I find myself looking forward to each class because I feel as though they are helping me rediscover why I love learning. I started seeking creative solutions to difficult problems and studying in my free time just out of pure interest in the subject. We also have had the privilege of receiving lectures from active businesspersons within the Netherlands who managed to become successful in their respective fields. We have had lectures from business consultants, CEO's of

companies, networking masters, and we even got a lesson on how to pitch business ideas.

### **Comfortable and Confident**

In closing, my experience at the VU so far has been quite educational. I realize now that my original worries about being overwhelmed by my courses were completely unwarranted. I feel extremely comfortable and confident in my minor program and I am proud of the progress I have made in the last period. I feel as though the hunger to learn more about my field of study is growing daily and I actually look forward to studying in my free time these days. I am extremely happy that I chose the VU as my new university and I am grateful that they have helped reignite my passion for learning.

Finals are just around the corner and everyone is hard at work studying. So if you all excuse me I better go hit the books! Thanks for reading everyone and till next time!

-Ruben

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