



WUR Goes Abroad

1. Student information

Study programme WU	BSc Plant Sciences
Exchange semester (dd/mm/yyyy)	19/01/2024 until 10/05/2024
Exchange destination: University	University of Wisconsin- Madison
Faculty	College of Agricultural and Life Sciences
Country	USA
City	Madison

2. Motivation for exchange

a. Why did you choose to go on study exchange?

To experience different methods of teaching, and follow courses on microbiology that were not offered in Wageningen.

b. What is the reason you chose for this country?

I preferred an English speaking country, and I like the climate of Northern USA.

c. What is the reason you chose for this university?

This university is high ranking nationally and globally, offers the most courses that I was interested in, has a great location (close to Chicago, lovely city for students, relatively safe), and the region and university are known for agricultural research and development.

3. Accessibility to reach destination

a. Do you have any advice about reaching your exchange destination?

Fly to Chicago O'Hare (huge airport, prepare for trouble with lines and customs), then either take a plane to Madison Dane County Regional Airport (short flight, small airport, very easy, short bus ride to campus) or a bus (about 3-4 hours) to Madison Campus (don't take the Greyhound: dangerous passengers, many delays, no bus stop close to campus. I prefer "Van Galder" as it stops directly on campus "250 N. Lake Street")

4. University and studying

a. Could you provide some general information about the followed courses?

	Course	ECTS	Short description of the contents	Appreciation of course: 1(low) – 5(high)	Remarks
1	Biology of Micro organisms	6	Basic biology of microorganisms, including structure, function, physiology, genetics, ecology, diversity, and evolution.	5	Best teacher I know: uses the online learning environment exceptionally well and gives great tips on how to prepare for exams. Great speaker, good powerpoint slides, knows everything on the topic. (Professor timothy Paustian)
2	Plant-Microbe interactions	6	Molecular and ecological aspects of the interactions between plants and microorganisms. Explores many themes: genetic to integrative, modern biology, the methods to study plant-microbe interactions...	5	Very challenging for undergraduate, but awesome teachers and very interactive lessons that make it worthwhile!
3	Ethnobotany	6	Study of interactions between human cultures and plants. Themes include: traditional agriculture, crop domestication, evolution, archaeobotany, indigenous knowledge, plants in symbolism and religion, dietary patterns, phytochemistry, global movement of plants and peoples.	4	Slightly more on the social sciences, but great to connect past and modern uses of plants to their origin, domestication, cultivation methods, and chemistry. Not difficult, but quite some reading and writing.
4	GM Crops: Science, Regulation, and Controversy	4	How and why genetically modified (GM) crops are created, how they are regulated at the federal and state level, and how they are seen by people from different backgrounds. Through case studies, students learn about impacts of GM crops on individuals, regions,	5	Great readings, class discussions, and enthusiastic teacher with long history in the field. Covers history of biotechnology, timeline of plant breeding methods, and scientific discoveries and (governmental) institutions that evaluate their safety to

			countries, politics and economy, and critically evaluate arguments both for and against their use.		human health and environment.
5	Indigenous foodways: food and seed sovereignty	4	Indigenous foods of North America are essential to modern agricultural and food systems. Indigenous foods and foodways are examined from historical, legal, biological, and social perspectives. Efforts to re-claim agricultural traditions and foodways to improve public health, economic opportunity, and food and seed sovereignty are discussed, including the healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods. Focus is placed on the mechanisms and policies that govern food distribution.	4	Very interactive class: weekly reading journals, sometimes cooking classes with local/indigenous crop varieties, many guest lectures and excursions. Grading based on short presentation and large term paper. Activities include ice fishing, tapping maple trees for syrup, and working with flint stone.
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b. I had sufficient possibilities to select suitable courses that were taught in English (Yes, No - Explain):

yes

c. I had sufficient possibilities to select suitable courses in my field of interest (Yes, No - Explain):

yes

d. I am satisfied with the level of the courses that I followed (Yes, No - Explain):

yes

e. I am satisfied, in the end, with the selection of courses I followed (Yes, No - Explain):

yes

f. What is it like to study there?

E.g. Study forms, academic level, examination, workload, lesson material?

The semester is much longer than in Wageningen. You follow around 4 courses (total of around 15 credit = 30ECTs) per semester. The classes are often very interactive, you introduce yourself and talk to students, teaching assistants (TA's), and professors. There are office hours to talk to TA's and the professor about assignments or the lectures when you need help. Exams are generally somewhat easier than in Wageningen but the workload is much much higher: many assignments and readings per week, all through the online learning environment Canvas. You have between 1 and 4 classes per day depending on your schedule. Lectures are often 50 minutes and you have 15 minutes in between, so sometimes you need to run.

g. What is the culture of the university?

E.g. How approachable are the lecturers, engagement with local students? What are the differences with WU?

In my experience, all teachers go by their first name. Everything is very informal. There are lectures like in Wageningen, but also "discussions" where you talk with either the professor or a TA in group setting about the materials. Being open and taking initiative is very appreciated.

h. What does the university offer students additionally?

E.g. Catering, sports facilities, laundry facilities?

You can get a meal plan, which is mandatory if you stay on campus. This offers a minimum of 10 free meals per week at the cafeteria for about \$1000 per semester. Otherwise you pay per meal if you dine there. The gyms area amazing, gigantic, and free for all students. You can visit many libraries on campus (about 30?), my favourite is the Law Library. Many departmental buildings also have study spaces.

5. Housing-traveling-living

a. What are the possibilities for housing?

E.g. Availability to sign up for a room on campus, private rooms, rent rates?

On campus is somewhat more difficult to find I have heard. You will share a room with at least one other person. It would be around \$3300 or more per semester, but you have to get a meal plan if you stay there (>1000\$). You can search for off campus housing, for example on Facebook. I found a shared bedroom off-campus in an all-girls house for \$625 per month but it is rare. Expect 800-1300 per month for off campus housing. Best area is around Union South, Birge Hall, Nicholas Recreation Center, and State Street.

b. What is the culture like?

E.g. Differences with home, local cuisine, habits, manners?

Mainly fastfood restaurants (burgers, fries, chicken), also some good Chinese, Indian, Italian. Everything in the grocery store and drug store is much more expensive, especially deodorant, personal care, and fresh fruits or vegetables. The bread is mostly

toast-bread (casino white in NL), sugared and low-fibre. It takes some practice finding the good products but they exist. Madison itself is very walkable/bike-able. People talk to you everywhere, they smile and make conversations with everyone. Most people talk very fast.

c. Could you give some information about public transport infrastructure?

E.g. Cost public transport card, taxi prices, how to travel to the university?

All public transport is by bus. Most inner city busses are free, and as a student you get a bus pas that allows you to use the main transport always for free (normally \$2 per 1.5 hour).

6. Expenses

a. Can you give an indication of your expenses for/during your exchange?

Category	Expenses
Travelling there	€1100
Visa - if applicable	€400
Vaccinations - if applicable	€0
Insurances (extra) - if applicable	\$600
Daytrips/sight-seeing	\$500
Housing costs per month & type of housing/accommodation	\$625 (shared bedroom in 3 bedroom/2 bathroom house with 4 girls total)
Grocery costs per month	\$150
Public transport costs per month	€0
Restaurant/going out for dinner costs per month	\$50

b. The price levels were in general [higher; lower; equal] in comparison to in the Netherlands:

higher

c. Additional remarks regarding expenses?

Groceries are very expensive, as are personal care items from the drug store. Eating seasonal foods helps, buying larger packages helps, picking your restaurants and bars wisely helps. You can sometimes ask part of your insurance fee back which saved me \$400.

7. Free time

a. What are must-sees in the area?

E.g. Nearby destinations, how do you prefer to travel, when to plan?

Chicago (by bus, \$35 single ride, once there use public transport by buying train/bus tickets at machines, check online for tourist places)

Capitol (walking distance, free)

Campus itself

Lakeshore path and Picknick Point (Lake Mendota, walking distance)

Zoo (free, walking distance)
 Lake Monona park/beach (walking distance)
 Olbrich botanical gardens (20 minute bus, free outside and around \$8 inside)
 Arboretum (20 minute bus ride, free)
 Devils Lake (1h car drive, \$13 per day)
 Farmers Market (April-October? Large open air market around capitol every Saturday from 6am-12pm)
 Babcock Dairy shop for the best ice cream (on campus)
 Allen Centennial garden is cute in spring/summer (on campus)

b. What does not appear in a travel guide, but is definitely worth seeing/doing?

If you can, go to Devils Lake. National Park around a lake, many different tracks and paths for a difficulty level to your liking. Pick a rainless day, bring sunscreen, a hat, water, good shoes, and bug spray. Beautiful views, canoeing, swimming, big birds, big butterflies.

8. Challenges & best moment abroad

a. Any challenges? How did you deal with them?

I struggled with the course work load in the first weeks and decided to drop one after discussing this with the academic advisor. It was extremely cold in the first weeks which made me afraid to go outside alone, so I tried to always go with other people until it got warmer. I was afraid not to make any friends and I joined all the international student events that were advertised by email and on the international student services website: I found tons of (lifelong?) friends. I experienced difficulty with some course materials and went to the teacher's office hours which helped tremendously. I had trouble concentrating in this new environment and found perfect study spots in several buildings. I got bad news from home and talked to my new friends about it. My drink in a bar got spiked and I got very sick, but because I have roommates that took care of me everything ended well.

b. Best memory?

I went tot Picknick Point between 11pm and 2am, with waffles, popcorn, other snacks/drinks, with many new people, and we sat to watch the moon and stars while surrounded by silhouettes and blinking eyes of raccoons.

9. Contact details

Is the reader allowed to contact the writer?	yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
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