

Experience Report – Study Abroad Semester

Avans University of Applied Sciences, Breda, the Netherlands

Student: Mushab Muhammad Fadhlullah

Home institution	Hochschule Trier – Fachbereich Wirtschaft, International Business
Host institution	Avans University of Applied Sciences, Breda, the Netherlands
Period abroad	1 August 2025 – 30 June 2026 (two consecutive minors, one academic year)
Programmes followed	1) ACT – Act for Change Together (30 ECTS, Aug 2025 – Jan 2026) 2) Minor Strategic Business Decisions (30 ECTS, Feb 2026 – June 2026)
Result	Both minors successfully completed and passed (60 ECTS total)

1. Host University, Period, and Programmes

I spent one full academic year (August 2025 – June 2026) at Avans University of Applied Sciences in Breda, the Netherlands, as part of my International Business degree at Hochschule Trier. Rather than a single semester, I completed two consecutive 30 ECTS minors back to back: ACT – Act for Change Together (Commerciële Economie / International Business track) from August 2025 to January 2026, followed by the Minor Strategic Business Decisions from February to June 2026. Both minors were completed successfully and are officially certified by Avans's Examination Board (13 July 2026).

ACT – Act for Change Together (30 ECTS)

ACT is an interdisciplinary, project-based minor that brings together students from very different study backgrounds (business, art, communication) to work on a social-impact project of their own choosing. It is graded on a pass/fail basis rather than with numeric grades. There is no fixed lecture list; instead, the minor consists of recurring workshops and one-on-one coaching sessions with a small team of lecturers/coaches (Rynko, Vincent, Inge, Elena, Marit, Joline, Ewelina), interspersed with independent project work in small groups. Topics covered over the course of the minor included:

- Sensations & Engagement / moodboarding exercises on urban space and public expression
- "Museum of Me" – identity and self-expression through personal objects
- Economics and redefining value (Elena) – rethinking what "value" means beyond money
- Systems thinking and feedback loops (Rijnko)
- Theatre of the Oppressed (Vincent) – Augusto Boal's participatory theatre method
- Research, objectivity and positionality (Marit & Joline) – "Self as Context"
- Communication styles workshop (Rijnko) – DISC-style self-assessment
- Creative thinking and practical AI prompting (RTCQ framework)
- Prototyping workshop – building tangible/3D visualisations of the project idea
- Photo-essay methodology, applied to the group's chosen topic of phone addiction

My project group's topic was phone addiction and attention in public spaces; we researched existing initiatives such as The Offline Club (an existing Dutch initiative) and used photo essays to document how smartphones dominate everyday environments. I would recommend the systems-thinking and positionality workshops in particular, since they are directly transferable to almost any later research or consulting work.

Minor Strategic Business Decisions (30 ECTS)

This minor is a more traditional, grade-based business minor built around one central group project (the "Project Strategic Business Decisions") supported by several shorter International Business Case (IBC) modules and two Pre-Graduation Training courses. My group worked on the Volkswagen case, and I was personally responsible for the trend forecast section and, together with a teammate, the organisation & people section (using frameworks such as McKinsey's 7S model, BOOST 2030, and the Zukunft VW agreement). The graded components were:

- Project Strategic Business Decisions (incl. Recommendation and Defence) – 5 ECTS

- Pre-Graduation Training I – Thesis Writing Skills – 3 ECTS
- Pre-Graduation Training II – Research Proposal Skills – 2 ECTS
- International Business Case – Marketing & Sales – 3 ECTS
- International Business Case – Strategic Finance – 3 ECTS
- International Business Case – Organisation & People – 3 ECTS
- International Business Case – Supply Chain Management – 3 ECTS
- International Social Entrepreneurship (video + business plan) – 4 ECTS
- Sustainable Business – 4 ECTS

I would especially recommend the Strategic Finance and International Social Entrepreneurship modules: the first gives a very applied, case-based refresher on corporate finance, and the second pushes you to actually build and pitch a business plan with a sustainability angle rather than just analysing one on paper.

2. Preparation and Application

Since Hochschule Trier has an existing exchange agreement with Avans, the application itself was handled almost entirely on the Hochschule Trier side rather than through a separate Avans application process. The only hard requirement on my end was an IELTS score of at least 6.5; there was no interview. On top of that, I had to complete the usual administrative steps: a Learning Agreement / Training Agreement, coordination with the International Office at Hochschule Trier for recognition of the credits, and general enrolment paperwork. Compared to some other exchange processes, this was relatively low-friction.

3. Accommodation

Housing was arranged through WonenBredburg, the student housing provider Avans works with, and I paid roughly €760 per month. One important thing to know in advance: in Breda (and the Netherlands more generally), landlords typically expect you to pay several months of rent upfront – in my case the equivalent of about six months' rent had to be transferred before moving in. This is a significant amount to have available early on, so I would strongly recommend budgeting and arranging finances for this well before arrival rather than close to the move-in date.

4. Costs

Overall, the cost of living in Breda was not dramatically different from Germany, with the main exception being rent, which is noticeably higher. Groceries were comparable, and in some cases cheaper: I found that shopping at Arabic/Middle Eastern grocery stores and butcheries in Breda was often less expensive than equivalent shopping in Germany, particularly for meat and fresh produce. Since both minors are part of the standard exchange agreement, there were no separate tuition fees beyond what I already pay at Hochschule Trier.

5. Everyday Life and Leisure

Everyday life in Breda was very easy to settle into, largely because almost everyone speaks English fluently, which removed a lot of the friction I initially expected. The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) was a major part of my social life: they organise events almost every week, ranging from casual meet-ups and board game nights to bigger themed parties in clubs around occasions like Halloween and Christmas. This made it very easy to build a social circle quickly, even without speaking Dutch.

For studying or just relaxing outside of student housing, Breda has a good range of cafés and public spaces. Library Nieuwe Veste in the city centre is a popular study spot with free Wi-Fi and reasonably priced food, and cafés such as Bagels & Beans, Anne&Max, and Coffeelab are well known among students for combining decent coffee with a good place to work. Valkenberg Park is a nice spot for a break or a picnic, and Mastbos, one of the oldest forests in the Netherlands, is great for cycling if you want to get outside the city. For evenings out, the area around Havermarkt and Vismarktstraat is where most of the student bars and clubs are concentrated. I also played padel regularly with friends from my project group, which became a nice routine outside of coursework.

6. Advantages of the Exchange

- Doing two different minors back-to-back gave me exposure to both a creative, project-based way of learning (ACT) and a more conventional, case-based business curriculum (SBD) within the same exchange year.
- The ACT minor in particular pushed me outside of my usual business/finance comfort zone through workshops on systems thinking, theatre-based methods, and positionality – skills that are less commonly taught in a standard business curriculum but are very useful for team-based, real-world problem solving.
- English being the working language almost everywhere made day-to-day life and socialising significantly easier than I had anticipated.
- A strong international student community (through ESN and the diversity of the ACT group itself) made it easy to build a network from many different countries and backgrounds.
- Breda is compact and easy to navigate by bike, and its central location in the Netherlands makes weekend trips to other Dutch or Belgian cities very convenient.

7. Negative Experiences

I did not have any major negative experiences during my time in Breda. The one practical difficulty worth mentioning again is the upfront rent payment requirement through WonenBreda, which can catch students off guard financially if they are not prepared for it in advance.

8. Recommendations for Future Students

- Start the IELTS process early – it is the one hard requirement, so make sure your score (6.5+) is confirmed well before the application deadline.
- Plan your finances for the upfront rent payment through WonenBreda months in advance, not the week before you move.
- If you get the option to choose your minor, don't dismiss something like ACT just because it looks less "business-focused" on paper – the soft skills (systems thinking, communication styles, positionality) transfer very well into later strategy and consulting work.
- Join ESN as early as possible; it is by far the easiest way to meet people and build a social circle in the first few weeks.
- Explore grocery options beyond the big supermarket chains – Arabic/Middle Eastern stores in Breda offer good quality at lower prices.

Contact

If you have any questions about the exchange, the ACT minor, the Strategic Business Decisions minor, or life in Breda in general, feel free to reach out to me at msfd1511@hochschule-trier.de.