

Hello, I am Jonas Bonnstaedter. I completed a dual degree program, Master of Science in Economics and Applied Economics, at Maastricht University and the University of Antwerp, respectively, and graduated in September 2025.

My journey began in the Netherlands at Maastricht University, where I completed one academic year. The first few weeks were very intense, and the course placed a lot of emphasis on interactive participation. Our class was small, with around 25 students and 7 dual degree students, while 6 were on the same program as me and one student was on a dual degree program with UCLouvain. The interactive classes focused on direct contact, quickly creating a close and even familiar atmosphere with my fellow students and professors. In addition to social events, the first six weeks focused on learning the basics of RStudio and relevant economic theory. This period was very intense, especially for students who had a different academic background. The six weeks were accompanied by weekly group assignments. The professors took the time to bring all students to a similar level, and made sure that all learning groups were accompanied by technically stronger students. Since problem-based learning was a change from lecture-based learning, it was very helpful to “suffer” and learn together with fellow students.

Afterwards, it was possible to specialize as a dual degree student in two instead of one of the three offered majors. This program at Maastricht University is less based on exam-based performance assessments and more on participation and process in presentations or assignments such as academic papers. This was also new to me as a student who was used to exam periods and had placed more emphasis on social interactions than coursework, especially at the beginning of the semester. The first semester, which was divided into two learning blocks, was very time-consuming and intensive until I got used to the new pace. Personally, I benefited greatly from this and was able to surpass myself. As someone with ADHD, the fast pace was ideal for staying on track. There wasn't much time to catch a breath, but there was enough time to hang out with my fellow students and later friends, as we actively exchanged ideas several times a week in tutorials or private group work.

The second semester was a little more relaxed, which enabled me to tutor interactive courses for bachelor's students. This was also something I found difficult to imagine before starting my studies, but Maastricht University gave me the opportunity and the confidence to get involved and learn new skills. As already mentioned, the university places great emphasis on academic work. Not all courses had technical textbooks; instead, it was necessary to read one or two papers to prepare for the weekly classes, and actively participate

In the summer, there was time to do an internship or summer school, which could be credited as ECTS in the second year at the University of Antwerp with 3 to 6 ECTS. I did an internship at the OECD in Paris as a data analyst. Since I was already familiar with RStudio and created an amount of presentations/papers as coursework Maastricht, I was able to integrate seamlessly into working life. Therefore, the first year in Maastricht is highly recommended for students who want to gain a foothold in academia or international institutions later on. Its fast pace also prepares you well for work as a consultant.

The courses in the second year at the University of Antwerp are lecture-based as usual, so again a small adjustment to the usual pace of semester blocks and no compulsory attendance for about 3-4 months was required, with one exam period per semester. More technical courses were offered here, such as Applied Econometrics, which was accompanied by computer classes to learn programming in Stata. Reference was also made here to slides and accompanying

literature, whereas at Maastricht University much was learned through “learning by doing” and participation in class.

The courses at both universities complement each other very well. While I missed depth in some areas in Maastricht, Antwerp taught the coursework using a more technical approach. So, in my first year in the Netherlands, I benefited from learning to present myself confidently and consolidated my technical gaps during my year in Antwerp. Both universities are very demanding, and in Maastricht in particular, weekly assignments stress but motivate you to stay on the ball.

Maastricht offers thereby a small but elite and familiar environment. There are many social activities on offer, as well as integration into student associations and their events. All in all, the business orientation dominates here, so students who value a fast-paced environment will get their worth. In Antwerp, there was the opportunity to consolidate your knowledge in elective courses in the direction that suits you best.

The dual degree offices were always very helpful and immediately available, so that administrative uncertainties could be resolved quickly. In addition, both universities offered events specifically for international and dual degree students, so that you never felt alone during the sometimes nerve-wracking two years. As a student who does not speak Dutch, I really enjoyed the fact that I was able to get by everywhere with English.

Both cities are unique and very well connected in terms of transport. Outside of class, I enjoyed the peace and quiet in Maastricht, where I was able to enjoy nature, explore the small old town, or work out at the UMSports fitness center. Antwerp is a larger and louder, which I liked after the quieter year in Maastricht. Antwerp is also very beautiful and has its own character thanks to its port. Its proximity to Brussels is also very convenient for day trips or career-oriented events in the Euro bubble.

My personal journey now continues as a PhD student at the University of Antwerp. Thanks to the two master's degrees, I feel well prepared and have benefited greatly from the large number of created academic papers, both individual and group work, and the technical specialization at the University of Antwerp, which will enable me to continue my studies successfully as a PhD student.

I can therefore only recommend starting as a dual degree student at both universities. You can expect an exciting year, learning many different skills, where you never really feel alone, but can build close friendships with your fellow students. The professors were also always available for questions or difficulties. My advice is to make sure you stay active in your coursework in Maastricht from day one. Due to the large number of group activities, I would also advise against approaching the course as a lone wolf. And if you have worked more for yourself up to now, Maastricht offers you the opportunity to discover new sides to yourself.

In Antwerp, I had more time to develop my skills outside of my field of study or to travel during my free time. In Maastricht, it is advisable to look for accommodation early on, whereas the housing market in Antwerp is a little more relaxed for students. In Antwerp, there are many dorms within walking distance of the city campus, which also offers an affordable cafeteria and a large library. Thanks to my room in foot walk to the university as

well as the cafés and shopping opportunities close by, I spent many days in the small “student island,” whereas in Maastricht I spent more time on the Maas or in the city center.

