

**EXCHANGE REPORT****Name****Year and term for exchange**

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Exchange university

ENPC

Degree programme

TTGTM

Beautiful city, disappointing university experience

Before departure

As a French national having never been able to live in France, I was interested in living there for only a couple of months to experience the French way of living. So after looking at exchange opportunities offered by KTH, I realised that Ecole nationale des ponts et chaussées (ENPC) was one of them. In fact, this school is well known for its prestige and very selective admission process for all French and French-speaking people. Finally, after finishing my high school in a French educational system, I always wanted to study again in a French educational system post-school. As French is my mother tongue, I was not required to take any additional language courses. I also was exempted of any visa application as I was a French citizen.

Upon arrival

I arrived on August 24, 3 days before the start of the introduction week for international students. All new international students had a “Fika” with the school’s international coordinator and a couple of teachers. The international coordination did a small presentation of about the school and general expectation. After that a small BBQ was organised by the Bureau des Etudiant (BDE), the student union in French schools where we were able to interact with one other.

Financials

I applied for an ERASMUS scholarship but it took up to a month to arrive. After solving it, I supported myself thanks to the scholarship and personal finances. Life in Paris is a bit cheaper than life in Stockholm, but only by a little.

Accommodation

After getting accepted I started searching for apartments in both Paris and Champs-sur-Marne (the area where the school is) with a preference for Paris. I was able to apply for student apartments offered by the school but got refused (because, in my opinion, I was interested in renting it out for only 6 months). It was really difficult to find an apartment in Paris, even harder for short term. Most renting possibilities are offered via renting agencies and agents that demand a big number of papers such as a proof of residency and most importantly a guaranty person with their tax papers income and nationality, in case the tenant is not able to pay the rent. The agencies have a huge preference for tenants that have guaranty people who are French, work and pay taxes in France, even if it is still possible to find agencies that are more “lenient”. I was able to find an apartment thanks to a friend who knew a friend’s father that was interested in renting out his apartment.

University and studies

The university and studies was not what I expected. In fact, the university administration was really unprofessional and rude. I can only imagine how terrible it must be for a student who does not have

French as their mother tongue and/or a student who is not at all used to the French educational system. For example, it took me up to three weeks to get my learning agreement signed and I was requesting a simple signature as all other parts were filled. They managed even after specifically specifying were to sign to sign it at the wrong location. It was very difficult to blend into the studies as no clear explanation was done. I only managed to get the hang of it in December having two months of difficulties in understanding what was expected of me. For example, attendance is mandatory with the possibility of failing a course, even with way above passing grade, if a person managed to skip 5 lectures. That was not stated by any person working at the university, I had to hear it from a friend who personally experienced it.

Courses

The system of courses is really different from the one at KTH. In fact, I took up to 7 courses during the whole semester, for a total of 23,5 ECTS with quit a couple being worth only 1,5 ECTS. The start and end of courses are also randomly assigned and one learns from it thanks to their semester schedule. The way courses are registered in the system is also old school with the student having to go to the equivalent of the master coordinator to have their courses approved and signed by the student binding them with no option of changing the courses afterwards as a person has to manually input each student's courses to the system. This can take up to three weeks for the student to be guaranteed a place in a specific course. In fact, I was unable to change a course after it started realising it was too demanding and that I was not that interested by it. On this note, ECTS credits are assigned randomly according to some students at the university. I experienced this with my courses as I had to study twice as much for a 3 ECTS course than for a 4,5 ECTS course. Grade are handed after a big amount of time generally. As of February 25, I still have not received a grade of a course in which I passed the exam in the end of November. In general, I learned quite some interesting issues and concept but that was after I got the hang of the system and studies. In addition to that, the teachers tend to be this organised and unclear making time management difficult. For example, a home exam that was suppose to be sent to the student on the 21 of December was not sent until the first week of February, a week after the course supposedly ended. Some professors also tend to be arrogant and unhelpful, with the intention of only criticising the student's work or question without providing some solutions or answers.

City and country

Fortunately, I lived in Paris and not around campus which is outside of Paris. The city was wonderful and I really enjoyed it. I had a couple of friends that I know from before my exchange semester with which I spent most of my time there even if I was able to make a couple of friends from my university with which I used to go out with occasionally. The cultural life is really extensive in Paris with museums, exhibitions and theatre plays all over the city. The night life is also nice with bars and clubs that really everywhere in the city with relatively affordable prices for students. I was also able to visit Lyon and Stuttgart (Germany) thanks to direct high speed trains in France. However, they are not that cheap even if you can buy a youth card (Carte Jeune) for 50 Euro that can reduce the prices of trains by up to 30%. During the warm times, one can also chill by the Seine river where in some areas they have music of different genre. Tourism, of course is a most in Paris and quit affordable with some locations and museums being free for EU citizens of 25 years old or younger.

Leisure and social activities

The leisure and social activities even if present at the university was mostly done for the university students originally from ENPC, even if some inclusion of the other French and international students was attempted. The social activities in any case was not what I am usually interested in with a special way of experiencing student life. Other French student also found that the student life was weird and unpleasant when compared to their home French university. The fact, in addition, that the university is outside of Paris in a suburb with extremely limited stores and restaurants/bars (if any) made all activities located in a room (that is usually a class room) in the university building.