



2014-2015 Student Mobility/Exchange Program Returning Undergraduate Student Report

Host University: École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Paris

Host Country: France

Faculty/Department at Host Institution: Painting

Semester: Winter 2015

Date of Report: June 14, 2015

1. OVERALL EVALUATION

How would you rate your exchange experience overall?

Poor **Excellent**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Please explain your rating.

I rated my experience as an exchange student at the ENSBA as 6 out of 10. The school is very prestigious and historic. Its studios, library and facilities offer a beautiful setting to work in. However, the building is difficult to navigate because of the lack of signage. A command of the French language is necessary to accomplish tasks within the school. Securing a studio and creating one's course schedule is dependent on meeting with professors face to face and obtaining signatures. Have a physical copy of your portfolio to present on the ready. Hold on to your papers and make copies of everything; they are integral. Permanent students of the ENSBA are given priority over exchange/international students, limiting the choice of classes and studios. These qualities make studying at the ENSBA a unique, different experience. Paris has a wealth of cultural activities happening always. This was a large factor for me. The cinema culture is exceptional, and there are so many museums and galleries to explore. Parisians are very social, going out to restaurants and cafes is a regular, everyday part of life.

Why did you choose this host institution? What key factors or issues influenced your decision?

I chose the ENSBA because its studios offer autonomy and freedom. The work is self-guided, allowing one to determine their own projects within the school setting. The city of Paris is beautiful and offered a lot of inspiration within my work. It was an opportunity to practice and learn more French. The bike share system, metro and train infrastructure are wonderful, it is very easy to travel within the city, country and continent in general. As a major city, it is more on the expensive side, but not much more so than Toronto.

What was the most meaningful thing you learned while studying off campus?

Much of my learning off campus took place in museums. I brushed up on my art history and architecture and learned more about the history of Europe. Seeking beauty is not difficult in Paris, also the museums are free on the first Sunday of every month. The cultural offerings are

unparalleled. It is definitely an excellent opportunity to spend a substantial bit of time in the city. Superb wine, cheese, pastry and food abound. The café and restaurant culture is very enjoyable.

Please share a few of your most positive experiences and a few of the biggest challenges you faced.

I really enjoyed the opportunity to make a couple frescos. It's very process specific and the professor was very kind and patient. The morphology and explorer classes offered many opportunities for drawing from models. The painting studios are packed, and there's a definite fight for space. My proficiency in French is not very strong and it was a bit of an obstacle when trying to find places within the school and asking for help. I had to be assertive when defending my right to work in the space that I was allocated. My experience within my studio community was a little insular. Sometimes my paintings would be moved around and the wet oil paint was smudged or covered with dust.

2. PREPARATION

Please describe your preparation for the exchange, including banking, travel documents and student visa application. In retrospect, would you have done anything differently?

Apartments are difficult to secure. I spent a lot of time scouring apartager.com and leboncoin.com web-sites to no avail. Anything that looks too good to be true probably is. Meeting landlords face to face for interviews is the common way of being considered for apartments. Accomplishing these formalities online is a rarity. Be prepared to produce large stacks of paperwork outlining tax reports, citizenship papers, visas and apartment insurance. Liability insurance on top of health insurance is necessary when entering ENSBA. A French bank can provide liability insurance. I eventually found an apartment at parisstay.com, but it was expensive (950 euro/month on top of an agency fee). One could also check airbnb.com. Also it might be worth considering staying at a hostel for a couple weeks to conduct apartment interviews but there are no guarantees. A British exchange student needed to return back to his home institution because he could not get an apartment in Paris. The competition for apartments is steep, often there are huge lineups of other hopeful candidates. I opened a French bank account at Societe General. It took a week to make an appointment to open the bank account, bring all your paperwork. I have my Estonian EU passport so I didn't need a visa. My apartment insurance included liability insurance: <http://www.french-furnished-insurance.com/>

Are there any important items (e.g. art & design supplies, documents, specialty foods, health items) that a student should take to your host country?

The city and country runs on paperwork and signatures: bring copies and French translations of all documents; passports, visas, health/liability insurance, vaccine records, birth certificates, yours and your parents' tax reports for the current and previous years, tuition receipts and banking/student information. Art supplies are available at many stores, one can buy mostly everything there. Same goes for medications and supplements. In a large city such as Paris, mostly everything is readily available. If there are allergies, some restaurants might not be able to accommodate specific dietary needs. Students that had gluten intolerance or were vegetarians experienced some difficulty when dining in restaurants.

3. ARRIVAL

Was anyone at the airport, train station, etc. to meet you? Did you experience any difficulties upon arrival?

No one was there to meet me but getting to the city from the airport is pretty straightforward. The only difficulty I experienced was carrying both suitcases on my own while on the public transit system. It is a far way from the airport to the city, the train it's the most economic option. The train goes through the surrounding Paris neighbourhoods (the banlieus), which are very poor. There have been incidents of theft by residents that come on the trains leaving and heading to the airports. Beware of one's possessions at all times. It would be helpful to have a friend come along. Robbers know people are usually carrying all their travel documents and money on these trips. I would also recommend buying a brief and basic data plan for one's phone before a French number has been established. So that in case of emergency, phone access is possible. It can also take longer to establish a new phone number and internet than usual in Paris.

When should students plan to arrive at the host university? When did you arrive? Would you have benefited from arriving earlier?

I arrived almost a month earlier than classes started. My acceptance letter had got lost in the mail and arrived in mid-December, less than two months before the winter semester classes began in the coming year. I booked the first affordable flight to Paris and arrived on January 9. Classes began on February 2nd. I could have arrived for the beginning of February but the acceptance letter did not specify when classes began. It was in an email a couple weeks later that I found out when classes began. I could have paid one less month's rent, and I would have appreciated that. It was very last minute, compared with the other universities who had sent their acceptance EMAILS already in September and October. It did not leave much time to arrange for my accommodation.

Was there an orientation session offered at your host university? If yes, did you attend and what did you learn?

Yes, orientation was on February 2nd, I did attend and it was informative. It overviewed pertinent student information.

Is there a coordinating office for international students, including exchange students, at your host university? Is there a staff person you would recommend students approach with their questions?

Yes, Laurence Nicod is in charge of international students and is available to help at her office Monday-Friday 2:30-5:00pm.

4. ACCOMMODATION

Where did you live during your exchange? Were you happy with your accommodation?

I was happy with my accommodation, but it came at a high price. I needed to find it on my own. Despite what the ENSBA says, there are a select amount of apartments that they provide to students in need of housing. Be assertive when demanding their help. I was told that they do not provide accommodation but many students did find very affordable (600 euro/month) apartments with their help.

Did you have any difficulties arranging accommodation yourself? Did the host institution assist you in finding accommodation?

It took me a while to finally secure an apartment, but I did it on my own. ENSBA did not help me with this task.

5. STUDIES AT HOST INSTITUTION

To better understand the similarities and differences between academic studies at OCAD U and at your host university, please comment on the following:

Level of academic difficulty and challenge:

Time spent in class (# of hours per week): 30

Time spent working on projects outside of class (# of hours per week): 5

Studio-based work: 18

Oral presentations (Individual and Group): 5

Written assignments: 5

Interaction between students and professors: 4

6. SERVICES

Were there any extracurricular activities/events scheduled for exchange/international students at your host university (cultural visits, trips, workshops, etc.)? Which ones would you recommend?

There is a general ENSBA student organization that meets weekly to make cheap sandwiches and sometimes holds parties. One exchange student began an Erasmus group but it was not affiliated directly with the school.

What were the library and computer facilities like?

The library has a good collection of art and philosophy books but they can only be read within the library, they cannot be taken out. The library has a few computers and a printer, which sometimes is out of service for indefinite periods of time. There are also DVDs which can be taken out for a few nights at a time. On Mondays, the library opens at 2pm and closes at 7pm. Tuesday to Friday it's open from 11am-7pm. There are some computer labs elsewhere, I received conflicting information regarding setting up your computer account and was sent to different parts of the school to activate my card. I never ended up finding anyone who could help me with this and didn't use any of the computers at school outside of the library.

7. COST OF LIVING

How did you prepare yourself financially for your exchange? Did you pay for the experience entirely out of your own savings? Did you receive student or bank loans? Did you apply for /

receive any financial awards (scholarships or bursaries)? Did you have help from parents / family / friends?

I paid for everything from OSAP and a line of credit. I am in debt approximately \$15,000. My OSAP covered \$4000. I applied for the Joblin/Selig Bursary at OCAD but it was denied because the panel that were reviewing my application mistakenly thought that I had not applied for OSAP. However, they have agreed to give me a \$440 discount from my tuition in the upcoming school year. I paid for everything on my own.

In general, was the cost of living in your host country higher, lower, or similar to that in Canada? Please explain.

The cost of living in Toronto is high and not too different from Paris'. Rent in the downtown area is comparable, in the \$1500/month range. Public transit in Paris is cheaper and there are 14 subway lines, compared to three on the TTC. Cell phone plans with data are also affordable, (20 euro a month compared to on average \$70/month+ in Toronto). The cost of food/dining in restaurants/entertainment is also around the same. Shopping is more pricey in general in Paris.

8. EXPENSES

Exchange rate with host country: 1 Canadian dollar = 0.72085968 Euros

Time spent in host country (month/year - month/year): January/2015 – May/2015

Would you estimate that you spent more, less, or the same amount as an average, local student attending your host institution?

I would say that I spent about the same amount in general. Maybe a little more, but only because a local person knows better where cheaper prices for things are to be found. I was also there to try and benefit as much as possible from the selection of food and wine so I probably spent more than the average student in that respect.

Please complete the following budget to give other students an idea of what they can expect to spend in the host country.

Basic Expenses in Canadian Dollars:

1. **Tuition and general fees (paid to OCAD U):** \$2595.75
2. **School supplies:** \$250
3. **Rent or university residence:** \$1276.25 /month (x 5) = \$6381.25
4. **Rent-related expenses:**
 - A) **Electricity/Water:** \$41.62 /month = \$208.10
 - B) **Telephone:** \$34.68 /month = \$173.40
 - C) **Cable:** \$0 /month
 - D) **Other (specify) \$ /month**

5. **Groceries or Meal Plan:** \$ 337.42/month = \$1687.10 (I just tallied all my receipts, and am astonished it actually was that much. That's not including smaller purchases without receipts such as baguettes/croissants from the bakeries)

6. **Personal expenses (toiletries/cosmetics, etc.):** \$60 /month = \$300

7. **Laundry:** \$37.18 /month = \$185.90

8. **Transportation:** \$61.71 /month = \$308.54

9. **Leisure (Sports, Entertainment, etc.):** \$1000

10. **Travel health insurance:** \$310.07

11. **Medical expenses in host country:** \$0

12. **Round trip plane ticket:** \$1472.33

13. **Travel/trips during exchange:** \$1000

14. **Student visa:** \$0 (I have my Estonian EU passport)

15. **Other expenses (please specify):** \$
apartment/liability insurance - \$133.02
Paristay apartment agency fee - \$1002.97

Estimated Total Expenses: \$17,008.43 (my original estimate was around \$20,000 and it was pretty accurate)

9. ADAPTING TO YOUR HOST COUNTRY

Did you experience any "culture shock" during your exchange? How did you deal with it? Do you have any advice for students on how to adapt to life in your host country?

I found that people's idea of personal space was much less than what is commonly considered in Toronto. I came in physical contact with people regularly, especially on the metro. The French kiss on the cheek from side to side, hugs and handshakes are generally not done. Be polite. Even though Parisians might seem rude at times, a little 'bonjour', 's'il vous plait' and 'merci' goes a long way. Paris is the last frontier for smokers (7 euro a pack, one of the priciest cities in Europe for cigarettes). Always try to begin in French and make an attempt when engaging in conversation. Automatically starting in English is not very well received. The French are libertarians; many jaywalk, bud in line, jump fences, leave dog poop on the sidewalks etc..

Was there a lot of interaction between local students and exchange/international students? What is the best way to develop friendships with students from your host institution?

No, not in my personal experience. Speaking French is key, it makes a big difference. Also it helps to bring peace offerings when entering a new studio, like beer or pastries. Being outgoing,

confidant and charismatic pay off. If the students don't accept you at first, they may eventually with perseverance. Don't take anything personally, the French ignore everyone equally.

Did you have any unforeseen problems? Was there anything that you felt was strikingly different from what you expected? If so, is there a way that you could have prepared yourself?

I was annexed from my atelier when a Chinese professor arrived and suddenly occupied my space. I needed to find another atelier to work. Also the ateliers are gutted and cleared beginning in May and during this time, it is not possible to work in the studios. Always make sure you're clear on the rules, there are different ways of doing things in each studio and the protocol is usually not spelled out. You may see a student do one thing but always make sure if it's ok to follow suit.

10. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Please email your report to Susan Kemp, Student Mobility/Exchange Coordinator, at skemp@ocadu.ca