

SEP 25 2009

Sciences Po Direct Exchange, Paris, France; 2008-2009

Cell:

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I. Arrival and Orientation to Paris and Sciences Po

A. Accommodations the first month

- Well, I did not stay at Cite Universitaire during the first month, but many of my future friends did. Their experience there varied from absolutely horrible and dismal to great and convenient; it really depended on what building you were assigned. It is a 'university-like' community of buildings in the southern end of the city. It has a direct RER train station to the center, and then a short metro to Sciences Po. As far as I know, you pay around 500-600 euros for a month of living in a room (single I believe, though I am not positive). Internet is there and a kitchen, but no meals or food is provided in the price. And the agreement is one month only. This was attractive for many people because it ensures a place to go to immediately on arrival to Paris, and you meet a lot of other foreign students.

- I, personally, did not do this route. I booked a hostel in the center for 5 nights, hoping I would find an apt during that time. Thankfully I did – and I was very lucky. Many of my friends had a difficult time finding accommodations after Cite Universitaire. There is a bulletin board at Sciences Po in the building on rue de la Chaise (number 9 I think, it is the only SciPo building on that road anyhow) that has personal and real-estate ads for housing in Paris. You can live with a family or try to find a roommate or live solo in a studio – it has everything. But it is very competitive, so even if you live at Cite U for the first month, go there and grab the info that you see and get right on it. Don't mess around.

B. The Programme d'Accueil

- This was a worth while program, I think. The school puts you into groups according to your level of French, and it is a great way to meet people. The whole thing about welcoming you to French culture is a bit misleading because you really have to do that by yourself, and it takes time; it cannot really be taught. But, it is a nice way to meet people, kind of get settled in and practice some French, and getting accustomed to going to class and stuff. I recommend it. I believe it costs some extra euros, like 200-300 or something.

- In addition to French culture 'stuff,' we practiced the methodology of paper and presentation writing for our future classes. Whether your classes be in French or English, the methodology is the same, but very different to UW (as I will cover in the following section). For this reason alone, it is very helpful to do the Welcome Program.

II. Academics at Sciences Po

A. Evaluation of instruction – Comparing UW to SciPo

- Well, it is certainly a different way of teaching and learning at Sciences Po. There are two types of classes: lectures (cours magistral en français) and conferences. Starting with the lectures, they, too, are divided into two categories: French cours magistral and English lectures. In a French cours magistral, you have a 'section' class attached to it, whereas in the English ones, there is no 'section,' it is only the lecture.

- No matter whether the class is a lecture or conference, it is 2 hours. And, except the cours magistral en français, each class meets only once a week. So, it feels like you have a ton of time, and you kind of do compared to UW schedules, but that means that you have a lot of learning to do on your own, and no class everyday to check if you are keeping up. It is a very independent way of studying – very stand-off.

- The instructors are mostly professionals who teach. For example, for a sociology class, it is a sociologist who teaches on the side. There are few professional professors at Sciences Po compared to UW. That adds a different dynamic and practical aspect to the teaching and learning, but it also means that teachers tend to live inside their specific paradigms and are not always open to challenges on what they say.

- The conference classes have about 25-30 students and one teacher. So, like a section size class at UW. The English lectures have about 45-50 students and the cours magistral en français has about 200-250 students (these are the classes that have a mandatory 'section' or 'conference' attached to it – it is the only class that meets two times per week for 2 hours each time).

- The administration is much different than UW – it is not as attentive and very bureaucratic. By bureaucratic I mean many levels, slow working, and mostly disinterested. But, that is something to get used to because that is not only at school, but at banks, and everywhere. And you really get used to it and learn how to deal with everything as time goes on.

- Class work for the majority of classes that I took includes at least one presentation in front of the entire class and one paper. Below I list the different combinations of work I did for my classes:

Class type 1: solo presentation on a subject and one final paper (my choice topic)

Class type 2: two group presentations including a shared paper on presentation topics and one paper individually

Class type 3: one individual presentation, one group presentation, final paper and oral exam on the paper (my French cours magistral)

Class type 4: midterm paper and final paper, both individual, both assigned topics and final written exam

Class type 5: midterm paper with a partner and final written exam

Class type 6: weekly short papers individually on assigned topics, individual presentation and final written exam

So, as you can see, it really depends on the professor and the class as to what you will do in the semester. But, there are many presentations and you will be writing many papers.

- Library at Sciences Po is very different than UW. It is disappointingly small, and you can only check out 5 books at a time. Most of the books are not on open shelves, so to check them out, you must look up the numbers and title online (on its website) and fill out a small paper, turn it in at the front desk and wait either 45 minutes or one day to get the book. The drawbacks of this system are that you do not see the book before you check it out, so you don't know much about it or if it is even really relevant to what you want, and you must wait to get it, so the process is very long and outside of your control. I never studied at the library; it was chronically crowded and cramped. I would just study at home and pine for Odegaard at UW.

- Computer facilities are dismal as well. There are several small computer labs dispersed among three buildings. So, it is a giant pain if you want to print something (unless you have a printer at your apt) because in the 'peak hours,' you will have to wait to get a desktop to access your email or whatever to print.

- Classrooms themselves have good facilities. There are computers and projectors good for presentations. But, there is no air conditioning, so on hot days, it is pretty rough.

B. Quality of Instruction

- Like I said above, the teachers tend to be professionals in certain fields, so they practice what they teach 'in real life,' but they tend to be very rigid in their opinions and do not take too kindly to any objections from the students. It is not a bad thing, necessarily, it challenges you as a student to really see if you agree or not, but the problem is that you cannot disagree out loud, or in your papers. So, actually, maybe it is kind of a bad thing... it depends who you are.

C. Recommendations

- As for recommendations for classes, it really depends what you are studying. At Sciences Po, it offers political science, journalism, history, sociology, anthropology and economic courses. There are limited art or science oriented courses – you can take art classes for a fee, and it is removed from the school (I think – I am not really the best source for this type of stuff). So, just do what you want. Personally, I really enjoyed Histoire et droits des Etats (a cours magistral in French). It covered nation-building in Europe from the middle ages to the present, and it was fascinating. And the professor was the real deal (a 'real' professor) and knew so much.

D. Course work in relation to UW majors

- The classes I took at Sciences Po I chose because they sounded interesting. I did not go there with specific classes in mind. But, naturally, the courses there that interested me have some relation to what I am studying here at UW because my majors here interest me too, so there are natural connections just because of my disposition to certain subjects.

III. Housing

A. Available Options in Paris

- Like I said before, on arrival, if you signed up for it, you can go live at Cite Universitaire for the first month during the Welcome Program and simultaneously use that time to go find your own housing (9, rue de la Chaise building, 1st or 2nd floor). Or, there are many real estate agencies around Paris that have apartments for rent through them, and you pay an agency fee to them for helping you to find it. Hunting for housing is something you should do as soon as you arrive, no matter what or where you are doing or staying. It is severely competitive and needs to be done quickly.

- I chose to just get an apartment as soon as I could because I did not want to stay in the 'dorms' or anything, and I imagined that if I found an apartment quickly (I was lucky I did), then I would have already paid for a month in Cite Universitaire,

- It is hard to recommend something; just do what you want. I mean, I was lucky to find housing fairly quickly, but I knew people that did not find anything for weeks. It really depends on your personality, etc.

IV. Sciences Po Campus

- It is an urban 'campus' – it is very unlike UW where there is a campus. At Sciences Po, it is in old buildings in the middle of the city, which is wonderful. I really liked it. I missed the trees and stuff that UW has, but the school's location in Paris is perfect for the whole atmosphere. It is in a really safe, upscale neighborhood with several metro stops to reach it.

V. Health and Safety

- Well, it is really easy to start smoking there since so many young people do it... but that is totally a personal decision. France is fairly 'socialist,' so healthcare is 'free' (you are reimbursed as long as your social security number is valid – that is a whole other deal to try and get that, but the school helps you figure it out). In order to get your carte de sejour, you must have a doctor's appointment, and the government sends you a date, time, and place to go to get signed off for it (a doctor's office somewhere in your neighborhood). You must do it when they say – it is so complicated when you miss it and have to reschedule). Sciences Po's neighborhood is very safe, but the neighborhoods in Paris vary, and you will have to gage the place you live yourself.

VI. Cultural Aspects

A. Meeting people

- Sciences Po has dances every month or so, which are kind of fun. Mostly foreign kids go, so it's nice to meet them. Otherwise, there are so many clubs and stuff you can get involved in. Lots of the French students are involved in extracurricular groups, so it is not necessarily difficult to find one, but perhaps more difficult making friends.

B. Challenges and differences

- There are always challenges in adapting to new situations, and the inevitable differences, but that is part of the package you signed up for to go abroad. Some hardcore cultural differences I found were:

French students cite Wikipedia (covertly though)

Most students smoke

French kids dress really well (no sweats – ever)

But, the French friends I made were really accommodating of my French level – they were patient, and in every French class (course in French) I took, someone offered to read my work and correct the blatant vocab errors. So, it was not bad.

VII. Financial

A. Transfer from US to France

- I set up a bank account at BNP Paribas because they have a partnership with Bank of America (my bank here), and after I got some initial money in the BNP account, I filled out forms and sent it off to wire the money from B of A to BNP and it worked out fine.

B. Spending

- Totally depends on who you are. Totally depends. I spent around 1000 euros a month on everything – I had my own internet, rent, metro, food, fun, laundry, supplies, etc.

C. Unexpected spending

- Probably the social security cost I had to pay the school – I think it was either 75 or 175 euros...

D. Financial Aid

- I do not have financial aid from the UW.

VIII. Program/Exchange Administration

A. Sciences Po did my administration as it was a direct exchange (pretty sure....)

But, when I had other questions, I always asked the IPE office and it did a wonderful job of replying. I give it a 9.2/10

B. At Sciences Po, the administration was fairly straight forward once you got the hang of it. It works a lot with foreign students since there are always so many. I would give it a 6.7/10.

IX. Student type for this exchange

- Independent (really independent), driven, not too easily stressed, has some money to spend (Paris is very expensive in general and you want to feel like you can do things), and who likes France (and therefore forgives her for her occasional transgressions).

X. Overall Experience

- People asked me this ever since I got back a month ago, and I don't really have a very satisfactory answer. It was what it was. I made some great friends, challenged myself, learned a lot (beyond academics), and am happy I did it. That's all there is.