Exchange report – France, HT16-VT17, Eda Dagasan

Université Paris Diderot, Paris, France, HT16-VT17, Bachelor Program in Mathematics

Paris

Paris is a vibrating town with a high speed, a lot of people circulating and infinitely many things to see and places to discover. When getting to learn the Paris beside the tourism it is hard not to fall in love. The things to keep you busy in this town never cease. Being a student in such a place is not same thing as in a typical university town like Lund. To this kind of big city you should go if you want to live your life also outside of the student activities. One of my main reasons for going there was that I specifically wanted to have something different from Lund (together with the fact that the best universities in France are located in and around Paris).

Université Paris Diderot and its campus

Unlike Lund there are a lot of different universities in and around Paris. Paris Diderot (also called Paris 7) is one of the rare ones that are multidisciplinary and has a high ranking in mathematics. It is since recently located in the 13th arrondissement close to Seine.

As a student you often need to contact the departments where you are to study, to register at the courses you want to take etc. This may work a bit differently at each department, but I mostly got good help when I asked. I was assigned a coordinator at the department for mathematics but I never needed to contact her.

The organisation CROUS (that share some similarities with AF) has 2 cantinas and 2 cafeterias at the campus, where I could eat lunch for 3,25€ or buy sandwiches, cakes, coffee etc. to good prices. Basically no one brings food boxes and eating at the cantina was a way to get to learn the students in my class and other people at the university.

In Lund people may sometimes complain that there are not enough places to sit and study, but the only place where I could sit at the campus was at the library, which on the contrary is very big and open 6 days a week.

Arrival
The “Bureau de Relations Internationales” organised a welcome reunion the first day of the official university year for all the incoming students. They gave us information about the administration we had to get done and how to do it. We also got some advices for our stay at the university and in Paris, and we were guided around the campus. We had also the possibility to sign up for a buddy program, where we got in touch with a French student that would be able to help us out with primarily administrational and practical questions. However this started not until several weeks of the semester had passed and the majority of the administration problems were already solved. Actually I never met my buddy either, because she couldn’t come to the first meeting and she never contacted me, but I met several of my good friends thanks to this.

Paris Diderot offered a two weeks introductory “intensive” course to the French language and culture for international students in the beginning of the semester, to a fee of 200€. We also made some visits in the city. Annoyingly enough my other classes started halfway in, so I could not attend to everything. For the French I don’t think it was worth doing it, I did not make the remarkable progresses thanks to these two weeks.

Courses

All my modules were given in French, and I don’t think there is anything on bachelor level in English, even less for mathematicians. I did mostly math courses at the last year of bachelor, but I also took two cell biology courses with the first year students and some additional French courses. All the modules run over the whole semester and they are of different size, but generally 4-6 sum up to 30 ECTS. Thus the education reminds more of Swedish high school than university with so many classes at the same time. They practice an evaluation of the courses as a mean of the notes of the tests and partials during the semester and a final exam in the end. Consequently there are many tests to write and the time was very scarce each time (starting form 15 min at a test, up to 3h for an exam). The exams are sometimes not written with the intention that all the exercises should be solved, at least if you are not the best in your class. This was the most challenging as a student in France and I had to work a lot to pass. I saw that it was tough for the French students also, and students rarely get better grades than 75% (15/20). The amount of modules made me feel like I studied at 150-200% pace compared to Sweden.

Unlike the classes in Lund we didn’t have any course literature at all. The lectures notes, and to some extent the content of the exercises given during TD, defined the course content. We were sometimes given some reference books when we needed and there were many books available in the library, to get some extra support.

Mathematics:
*Topologie et calcul différentiel, 12 ECTS, Thierry De Pauw*
*Calcul Intégral, 6 ECTS, Loïc Merel*
*Analyse de Hilbert et de Fourier, 9 ECTS, Håkan Eliasson*
*Fonctions Holomorphes, 6 ECTS, David Gérard-Varet*
*Équations différentielles, 6 ECTS, Davide Barilari*
The way of teaching was the same in all of them, consisting of lectures (CM = Cours Magistraux) and exercises (TD = Travaux Dirigés). We had 2-3 of each every week (depending in the module’s size), normally 2h each (that means 2h, no academic 15 minutes or coffee breaks).
During the TDs we tried to solve, independently and within the group, the exercises we were given, with another teacher than the lecturer.
The level of the math courses was high, as was the speed. The contents were not so different and relevant for anyone wanting deep mathematical knowledge and skill.

**Biology:**
*Biologie cellulaire et moléculaire I, 6 ECTS, several teachers*
*Biologie moléculaire et génétique I, 6 ECTS, several teachers*

The setup for the biology was quite similar, but we had some additional laboratory sessions. I didn’t have to write any report but usually answer to some questions and hand in. This was hard the first times, since my French was still a bit slow and we weren’t left so much time to do it. These two modules belonged to the first year of biology studies and the level was quite basic.

**French:**
*Grammaire de français, 2*3 ECTS, Olivier Crepellière, Pascal Somé*
*Atelier d’expression écrite, 3 ECTS, Olivier Crepellière*
*Atelier d’actualités, 3 ECTS, Anne Le-Corre*

The university offers French courses for all the international students (exchange students as well as program students) during the semester. We were assigned a level after doing a language skill test online, but I asked to change my level to one below, that is on B2-level. There are both grammar classes and classes that they call "atelier", which focuses on other language skills: oral, writing etc. They are worth 3 ECTS each and I could take 1 grammar course 1 atelier per semester. Each of them corresponded to a 2 hours class per week and 2 tests per semester. They were all really good and I learned a lot!

**Accommodation**

It can be really hard to find an accommodation in Paris, and the rents are very high. I applied for a student accommodation via the university, but they didn’t have enough to offer me one. I also applied for Svenska Studenthemmet at Cité Universitaire without success. However these are good possibilities if you are lucky and they are not so expensive. If you are a student on masters’ level you can apply for all the houses of CitéU. I finally found an apartment to rent thanks to my uncle.
I would recommend searching accommodation in all possible ways. If you got any contacts – ask them. There are several Facebook groups where people post when they have rooms in shared apartments (search for “collocations”). There is in particular on Facebook “Svenskar i Paris” where many people write to find roommates, renters etc. The same group contains a lot of other useful discussions and recommendations regarding life in Paris for a swede.

**Leisure/spare time**
There are several Erasmus organisations (EIAP, ESN, Erasmus in Paris etc.) in Paris that offers events for international students: parties, bar crawls, language cafés, visits to interesting places and trips outside of Paris. I also learned about Club International des Jeunes de Paris offering a lot of cultural events and visits to museums etc. I went to both of these kinds of events and met some people that became my friends, but I wasn’t totally satisfied. That’s why I joined the only women’s’ floorball team in Paris, and I am very happy I did.

The offer of student activities at the university was quite a disappointment. I joined for half a semester a gospel choir that practiced during Wednesday lunches. The university offered a sport membership to a very good price (otherwise gyms and sport activities are really expensive), all from dance classes, team sports, martial art, weight training etc.

I didn’t travel a lot during my stay in Paris (but before returning to Sweden I went to the south west and south of France), because there was so much to do just in the city. When I didn't study or exercised, I often spent my free time outside, and there is always much people doing the same.

**Costs**

Life in Paris is expensive. On the contrary there are often student prices (e.g. on the metro card) and the majority of all museums are free for everyone below 26 years. The loan and grant from CSN together with the Erasmus+ grant covered most of my costs, that is around 1500€/month. Some estimated expenses to give an idea: housing 1 room/studio 500-800€, metro-/bus card for students 450€/year, a lunch in the city 15€, an espresso 2,5€, a baguette 0,90€, a glass of wine 4€.

Food in the supermarket is also expensive but not always of high quality. I found shops in my area where I could buy some groceries cheap (lentils, rice, spices etc.) and the open markets (marché) can offer in particular vegetables and fruits to either good prices or of good quality. This kind of questions can typically be discussed in the Facebook group Svenskar i Paris.

**Contact**

Everything I could tell does not fit in this report! If you are interested in what studies and life in France are like I’ll happily tell more: dagasaneda@gmail.com