

# Strasbourg end of year report

Université de Strasbourg 2022/2023 - Daniel Edwards

In my opinion there are different kinds of knowledge; you can know some things intellectually, but to really know them intuitively, it requires you to get off your metaphorical high horse and experience them. On my year abroad, I knew that I'd change, I knew that I'd be tested, I knew that it would be difficult, I had been told those things already. Either explicitly or implicitly. But I never really knew, and when I experienced those things, there were transformative effects that I find it hard to describe. It's a cliché to think that I would find myself whilst abroad and I wouldn't say that happened, but I did learn a lot of things about myself, and I believe that some of those things would still be unknown to me for many years had I not taken the leap and gone.

The year is what you make of it. If you read through the old end of year reports as I am now, you'll be able to intuit that each person had a different experience of what could be seen as the same thing. In my case, I took the year for my own personal development and to learn how to adapt and not just survive but thrive. I wanted a break from the ride of the education system to test myself in a different environment with less of a safety net. If there was one thing the year taught me, it would be humility; I had no idea how wrong and ignorant I could be. I hope that stays with me for much more than just this year.

I met many people from lots of different backgrounds during my year abroad. towards the end I asked a number of them how they felt about their time abroad and how they felt about it ending. One of the common answers was that people were sad to leave, some enjoyed it but were happy to be going back to the familiarity of home, a few were honest enough to say that they hated it there and they couldn't wait to get home, many said they would miss the friends that they would never see again, and some people didn't want to leave at all. There isn't a general rule for how these things go, no one really knows until they've made it there, and some people don't know even after they've left. Not to get too philosophical, but this choice really isn't incredibly significant, you go, or you don't. This is an opportunity that you don't have to take. But if you do, I strongly believe that it will set you up much better for almost every aspect of your future life than if you decide against it. Luckily Warwick makes it so that there is essentially no downside to going, you are financially supported with the Erasmus grant/Turing scheme funding (and CAF funding if you complete the application process), the rent is cheap (mine was 299 euro p/m) they give you an extra bell/whistle on your degree and you come back the next year with some additional experience in maths. You have support to make the decision, but no one is going to make it for you. You have to want it, do you?

### Practical information on getting started:

In this section I'm going to list some of the practical information from the start of my year that was particular to the Université de Strasbourg. This stuff was not particularly clear to me and caused me a lot of anxiety early on. I was in the last year of the Erasmus programme, so this may not all be applicable to you, but I hope some will be helpful - good luck :)

### Getting there:

- There are two offices at the Université that you'll have to interact with
  - o 1 – The whole university level “Erasmus” office. The woman I was communicating with was called Pascale Ranson – (NB Pascale is a woman's name [as it includes the 'e']). This group was extremely hard to contact but they spoke English)
  - o 2 – The maths department “Erasmus person” in the office – During my time it was Mme Lambert. I wouldn't recommend calling her on the phone unless your French is very good, but chatting to her in person was lovely.

Now, office 1 is tasked with getting you to the university; they stopped talking to me past September 6<sup>th</sup>. Office 2 was responsible for me from that point onwards – if I needed anything signed, I went to them.

### Choosing modules:

Their website was terrible when I was using it, I think they've updated it since. You need to try to navigate it yourself as much as possible as an international student as it is not very user-friendly and it doesn't need to be as most domestic students don't even get any choice in modules at undergrad. For my first term I took the modules from L3 – maths appliqués for that semester. Some modules run both semesters and some run for only one (L1 and L2 run both semesters always, the others don't)

### Inscription: (September 1st- September 12th)

I found this the most stressful time of the year. The term will start in full force before you are actually told where you should be going and what you should be doing. You need to try to get to the SEVE (Service des études et de la vie étudiante) asap and tell them you're an Erasmus student. They will give you an appointment for a manual scholarly inscription. I got mine a few days after asking. This will set you up with a proper student identity in their database system.

Now this process is automatic for domestic students, and they have earlier deadlines than you will, so if you look online (like I did) and see that the strict deadline for inscription for the current year has already passed (like I did) you don't need to have a mild anxiety attack (like I did) because you're all fine – if you show up and say you're Erasmus/exchange, they'll sort you out.

Once you have completed your scholarly inscription (scholarité) you will need to complete your pedagogic inscription (inscription pédagogique) which is literally just writing down your preferred modules on a piece of paper and signing it. As an Erasmus student you can pick and choose whatever modules you want (as far as they are concerned) as long as you convince the relevant heads of years to agree. What I did for my first term was to follow the maths appliqués course for S5 (L3) so there wouldn't be any clashes and I could just start going to classes.

### How to get to classes:

You can go to classes as soon as you know when they're happening. Once you do your scholarité inscription you'll get access to **ERNEST** which is their online portal. This portal has the following useful applications: **university email, Moodle, ADE** and **Emploi de Temps**. I will describe the last two which are the relevant ones here.

"**ADE**" is the database of all Classes and teaching sessions. With this, you will be able to see the times of all classes. It is not user friendly (especially on phone browsers)

"**Emploi de temps**" is their attempt to make ADE more user friendly It is not perfect, but it is worth working out how this works as it is much easier to get your classes from quickly than ADE.

NB 1: they move around classes a lot. It is not worth it to make your own timetable and expect it to work.

NB 2: Moodle doesn't automatically sign you up (especially as an exchange student ), so you'll need to make an effort to work out if your class has a Moodle page and if so, how to get access to it.

NB 3: once you have Moodle – look for a page called **Affichage L2 ... L3 maths** and inscribe in it. This has all the TD groups and test results.

Once you know where the classes are you can show up. They have lots of seminars which you should try your best to go to (they essentially replace homework) but you'll be put in a specific group (which you can ask about) but this can be changed with approval – just ask at SEVE.

### Getting your student card:

Once you've completed your scholarly inscription, it will come in the post to the SEVE. You can collect it from SEVE a few weeks later.

### Getting food from the cafeteria:

You need to set up an **IZLY** account then you can pay with the app (QR code) or with your student card as a contactless payment – **you cannot pay with your bank cards**. The cafeteria food is pretty great imo – especially for the price (it's government subsidized). I would generally go to Resto U Paul Appel (they have multiple cafeteria's) – it's the best one.

I think this should set you up okay for getting started, but there will be lots of new and unexpected things that will come your way. If you're ever feeling overwhelmed or lost, my Warwick email address is at the top, I may not be able to help but I should be able to point you in the right direction.

## General info:

### The maths:

The maths was different, they derive results in slightly different ways so you can't just rely on old tricks. I had to learn to redo Geometry and Motion (year 1 term 2 calculus) in a more rigorous (and different) way when I arrived which was an unexpected difficulty. I sucked at that to begin with and had to get help from the seminar tutor. They are more demanding than UK universities on the rigour and formalism of your arguments in exam solutions but are less demanding on the content side. This means that you have to learn the language of French maths (which is thankfully not very dynamic.) soit x et y positif etc. etc.

All their classes are at least two hours long which means two things. One: they go at a much slower pace (which I don't think is as bad as it sounds) and two: They do very little work outside of classes. You'll have seminars and lectures that seem to drag on forever and to be honest some do, you'll need to do some work on your mindset to avoid going stir crazy. I found it helpful to critique lectures whilst going through them and to relearn old parts of the course during slow points in seminars.

I'd recommend some of the master's level courses if you're interested in any of them. In particular I found the optimisation course in semester two very good. The M1 courses are the closest to year 3 or 4 Warwick courses as the L3 ones are a bit less demanding.

A lot of French people won't want to talk to you, don't take it personally – it's a bit of a cultural thing. There will be some that are happy to talk and if you can find them, they will be a great help to your learning and will reduce stress a lot when you miss a class since **There are no centralised lecture notes** for any courses (you'll normally get enthusiastic students uploading their own to a google doc or equivalent.)

Lastly some of your lecturers will be able to speak English – normally better than your classmates on average since they require it in French academia. I spoke to English speaking lecturers and seminar tutors a fair amount after classes for the first few months to get used to things. Identifying those lecturers may be a good idea if you're not confident with your French/ French maths vocab when you arrive.

### The city

Strasbourg is a very strange place. It's a tourist city without tourists for 10 months of the year. You'll find yourself amazed with how many people they cram into the streets of the central island when the Christmas markets come around, and you'll find yourself lost at how empty it becomes after they're gone.

It's a very international place too, it has a very high immigrant population and a lot of the residents of the city don't fall into French stereotypes. I joined an MMA class at the gym I found over there for a while and felt completely welcomed (in a combat sports way) by everyone there. You may get a poor impression about the sociability of the French youth from your classmates, but most of them are from surrounding villages and the culture tends to lead them away from being outwardly social from what I've experienced. If you have something you're interested in (or something you'd like to try), then you should be able to find it and you'll most likely find a welcoming community.

You're on the border with Germany but the German counterpart of Strasbourg (Kehl) feels like a large industrial estate. There is however tram access and the Lidl there is a notable attraction – I used to do my weekly grocery shop there in my first term as it felt significantly cheaper than French stores. There are also a few nightclubs there if you're prepared to go all night (last tram at 12:30.)

### Social life

I Would strongly recommend joining the **Erasmus Student Network (ESN)**. This basically was my social life over there and it was great. The organisation is a non-profit run by students in multiple areas who organise weekly/bi-weekly events that will bring together the masses of international students. I met 25 of my 28 friends through ESN and I know people who never found out about them (or didn't until the second semester) and were essentially alone through their time there. I will once again strongly recommend looking them up – they showed up to our first international student induction day and if you missed them there you could miss it completely. Don't miss out!

The nightlife is a bit poor for general clubs. I found however that it's got two of the best techno clubs in 200km or so. European music can be hit and miss but techno is pretty standard over there, and they do it well if you're into that. Otherwise, there are lots of decent bars with outdoor seating in the summer and I'd recommend them. A few people drink in accommodation, but bar culture is far more common over there (and the beer [cocktails are decent too] is better and cheaper.)

I had a good time with my year abroad. If you have any questions about the year or anything that I said in this doc, feel free to reach out to me via my Warwick or my personal email, I'll be happy to talk about any aspects of the experience that you're curious about.

Warwick email: [Daniel.edwards.1@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:Daniel.edwards.1@warwick.ac.uk)

Personal email: [dce@Edod.co.uk](mailto:dce@Edod.co.uk).