

Study Abroad Report – Université de Strasbourg

2018/2019

I've always been interested in languages, but having chosen maths as my degree subject, I never considered the opportunity of going abroad. It was mentioned within the first week of second term and both my girlfriend and I thought it was something to consider doing.

We considered different universities, but Strasbourg had two open places so we jumped on the opportunity to go there. Strasbourg is a lovely place and we were very happy there.

Level of French

When I read the other reports in preparation for my year abroad, I realised that everyone else seemed to have a much better level of French than I did. I had taken French at A-level, so got to quite a high level, but when I came to France, there had been a two-year gap since studying French formally. Naturally, I had forgotten some.

I would say don't get discouraged if you have a low level. You will improve in your abilities just as I did. The threshold is B1, and that's what the OLS (a test you have to do before you go abroad) said I was. I think I must have been borderline however, because when I arrived in France, I was a bit out of my depth. But I will say again, you will improve over the course of the year, even if it doesn't feel like it at the start.

Accommodation

This won't really apply to most people, because my girlfriend and I were looking for a place to live for the both of us. If you are a couple, it is quite stressful finding somewhere. Using Leboncoin (a website that advertises all sorts of things including flats) was the best option, but usually nobody wanted two people.

If you're going alone, using Leboncoin would be easy to secure a place I would imagine. The website that finally worked for us was Appartager.fr. This is a flat sharing site. If you have the option to share with native French speakers, I would highly recommend it!

A word to the wise is to watch out for scammers. I thought we'd found a perfect place with a rent we could afford. Then they asked for money without us having even seen the flat. Be wary!

First Week

If you are guaranteed a place, then you will have already filled out a form outlining what courses you want to study. Their university website is nowhere near as good as Warwick's and it was difficult for me to find out what courses they offered. However, using www.parcoursup.unistra.fr/?rof-program=ME14#data-rof-tab-cours you'll find all the course information. That is worth bookmarking now, because you'll need it a lot.

In the first week you have to go to the Erasmus coordinator in University House. We were then told to go to the Erasmus office in the maths building to say what modules you're doing. This was annoying because it was Friday, and the courses started the following Monday and no one told us we had to fill in a form before we started. For this, I would recommend going to University House as soon as possible when you arrive. Luckily, the office was still open and we filled out our forms.

Modules

Usually the courses to pick from are the Semestre 5 and 6. When we arrived, they thought (with our low level of French) to put us in a Semestre 4 course that was being offered to people who failed it. These were smaller classes and this also helped our French improve, by being less intimidating to talk.

The modules I took were algèbre S4, géométrie (both smaller classes mentioned above), calcul différentiel et integral 1 and topologie in term 1

In term 2 I took équations différentielles, probabilités, mesure et integration and géometrie S6

On top of this, there are French classes available however I'm not sure of their usefulness. There was a teacher and if you have questions this is helpful. However, most of the time you have to go for two hours a week and decide yourself what you're going to study. This can be kind of hard, when it's not structured. There are plenty of books there, but I would make a plan, so you're not feeling lost each week.

One thing to note is that there are things called contrôles continues spread throughout each term for each module. These are exams which test your knowledge of the subject up to that point. The first two last one hour and are worth 25% of the total mark and the last is worth 50% and last two hours. Given that they are during the term, it is necessary to keep on top of the work load. It is also necessary to attend lectures, because printed lecture notes don't seem to be a thing here.

Teaching

As other reports have mentioned, in France lectures last two hours and there are classes which last three. I didn't like this at all (especially when the class followed the lecture for a total of five hours of one subject in a row!). Most classes weren't that good. You had to sit at the front while they just wrote out the answers, instead of being able to try the questions yourself. Others were better giving you time to try the questions and then an answer going up on the board.

So many words are the same or at least recognisable. Common abbreviations include t.q. = tel que, s.e.v. = sous-espace vectoriel, m^{\wedge} (with the hat above) = même, c.à.d. = c'est-à-dire. Also note that eigenvectors/values are called vecteurs valeurs propres – that one had me stumped before I could look it up. In French open intervals are written] [which is very strange, but you will get used to it, and remember a 5.6 is written as 5,6. These are all things that made it a little difficult to understand, but as I said most things are very similar.

Final Thoughts

If you not sure if Erasmus is for you or not, I would say go for it. It was a really good experience which vastly improved my French (the main reason I wanted to go). It would've been a really good missed opportunity and I would have regretted it if I hadn't gone.

If you have any questions on going abroad, feel free to drop me an email at Geradcarter1998@gmail.com