

Erasmus exchange Blaise Pascal University Fall 2008

In today's globalized world it becomes more and more important to intergrate a semester or two abroad as a part of your degree. I'd been dreaming about spending a semester as an exchange student in a foreign country since I first started my education at HIOF two and a half years ago.

HIOF has a large number of partner institutions abroad so you actually have many choices when it comes down to finding an institution. I have to admit that I spent quite some time deciding where to go, but I finally opted for Blaise Pascal University located in Vichy, France.

I had to choose a university with a program taught in English due to my limited abilities to speak the French language.

Blaise Pascal is a large university located in Clermont Ferrand, France. They also have a smaller campus in the nearby town of Vichy. This is where they offer the program "International Business with French" which I attended.

Vichy

Vichy was my host town and I got a good feeling about staying there from the moment I arrived on a warm afternoon in late August.

I was picked up at the train station and taken to my accomodation by the program director. One of the good things about Vichy is that you can walk anywhere within the city centre- to the university, to the supermarkets, department stores etc.

Vichy also offers great possibilities for recreation such as a few musems, a huge beautiful park, swimming etc.

Vichy is a beautiful town with nice architecture and a fairly good infrastructure.

If Vichy gets too small for you after some time, it's good to know that the French rail network offers easy access to other parts of the country. Paris is approximately a 3 hour train ride away, and Lyon only 1 hour and 45 minutes.

Some academic information

You may get surprised when you arrive in this institution if you are used to attending a university in Norway.

There's no electronic blackboard so all messages from the lectures are given in class. You don't use any books – all course material is distributed in the classroom.

Do not expect any staff working at the university to speak English apart from the teachers and the few people in charge of the International Business with French program.

Attendance is not compulsory so you can take a week off to travel if that's what you want to do. You also have a two-week break in the middle of each semester so this program is definitely tailor made for travelling across Europe.

I took the following courses during the fall semester:

1. Doing Business in France
2. Negotiating in International markets
3. Intenational Business
4. Business ethics
5. French language class

It's important to point out that the classes are very easy (not challenging) if you have taken courses in Business / Economics previously. For example, many of the other international students in my class did not study business in their home countries.

I would also like to specify that none of the classes featured any topics on economics (such as finance, micro/macro economics etc)

Most of the courses did focus more on intercultural communication than business.

I had some trouble in the French class because I didn't have any prior knowledge of the French language before I arrived. Most of my classmates had already taken French in their home country or spent time learning French in France previously.

The semester kicks off with a two-week intensive French course. After those two weeks, you'll only study French 5 hours each week. You can expect to do lots of studying on your own if you have ambitions to improve your French skills. But this is most likely not required if your only goal is to pass the class and if you're not looking for a personal gain.

Housing information

You have two options when it comes to housing – you can stay in a student residence or you can find your own apartment or studio. In either case, the international office will assist you along the way.

I requested a small studio in a student residence prior to my arrival in France, and the international office took care of this for me.

Very easy and straightforward, just e-mail the university before you arrive to ask for assistance.

Social aspect

I was pleased to learn how easy it was to make friends among the other international students. Remember that they're all in the same situation as yourself and most of the other students are very eager to make friends. Don't be afraid to talk to as many people as possible during the first weeks in school and I can guarantee that you will make many new friendships.

In my opinion, it's very challenging to spend time by yourself and be bored because you always have things to do and/or people to hang out with.

I had people from the following countries in my class: Canada, US, UK, Germany, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Italy, Brazil, Mexico, China, Taiwan, Singapore so I definitely got a taste of many different cultures.

Advantages of studying in Europe as an Erasmus student

You pay absolutely no tuition fees and you also receive a scholarship/grant of approximately 320 Euros a month.

Needless to say, this is financially a much better option than going to the more "traditional" countries such as US, UK, Australia etc. where you have to spend lots of money on tuition.

The application process is also more hassle free and I was actually surprised how straightforward it was to apply for admission. I only had to fill out one or two application forms and this took less than 15 minutes!!

Another advantage of studying in Europe is that you don't need to apply for a visa. You just book your air-ticket and you're on your way!

In my opinion, spending one or two semesters as an Erasmus student does not require lots of preparations compared to other overseas mainstream student destinations.

Conclusion

The international Business with French program offers you a great opportunity to meet France as a country, to make many friends from different countries and cultures and to learn some French if you are motivated and willing to do an effort.

I regret to say that the business classes are not of very good academic quality and students looking for an academic challenge should not under any circumstance attend this program. However, if you are looking for a "gap" year, looking for a cultural experience, travelling etc., there's no doubt that this may very well be the right program for you.

France is one of the greatest and most exciting destinations in the world so I'm sure you will have a good time there☺

You'll also be better off financially than your friends going overseas to English speaking countries to study.

Good luck !

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28-01-2009