



## Tips on Studying Abroad at Sciences-Po in France

Want to know what it's like to study abroad? Want to know what your peers think? Your fellow Georgia Tech students who have previously gone on this exchange program gave their opinions so that future participants have the inside scoop on their host institution and host country.

### Preparation & Getting Started

- A year before I left for this study abroad I went on another one, a 6-week program in Toulouse, French LBAT. I really loved my experience there but it was too short to really improve my language skills, so once I got back to US I considered returning to France for a longer period of time. I wanted to improve my French in a significant way, so a year in France appeared logical to me. I decided to do a year-long study abroad, so I chose Paris which has so much to offer culture wise. Conveniently for me GT had an exchange program with Sciences-Po, one of the best universities in France to study political science and international affairs (my major). I was happy to find out that my HOPE scholarship would pay for tuition and I could use my scholarships in the same way I used them here.



- It was not too difficult to get my courses pre-approved as far as paperwork goes. But most courses only have descriptions in French, very short ones or none at all. Something to be aware of is that not too many courses have exact GT equivalent, so if you are short on elective credits or you are close to graduation like I was, be careful choosing your courses. It is best to get approved for more courses than you can actually take, since you

might not get every course you want once you try to register.

- Registering for courses at host school was a little hectic and not as well organized as at GT. They use the same online system, but everyone of your year goes to register at the same time. You only have one day to register and you risk spending the entire day in front of the computer trying to get the courses you need. They open only 5 spots at a time, and there is no knowing if they will open more spots later on or if the class is already full. Overall, registration is a rather stressful experience, so make sure you have a good idea of what classes you want and a good back-up plan. The sad part is that they give you the exact day and time of classes only a week before registration and for some classes you find out when you try to register. Another thing, if you don't have your own computer at home or Internet connection, make sure to come to the computer lab early in the morning.

### Housing

- For the first month during the Stage d'Integration I got to live in Cite Universitaire. And there is an application online, make sure to get it done early. Living there is not so bad you don't mind sharing a bathroom and a kitchen. It is a very good deal. For the rest of the time, I looked for an apartment myself. Start early, make sure you have somebody with a job in France who can sign the contract with you.



- Cite Universitaire is close to Peripherique, in the 14<sup>th</sup> district, pretty convenient, 30-minute ride on metro from Sciences-Po.
- I had no roommates but I think rooms with roommates exist as well.
- I think the room at Cite U cost me about 360 Euros which is a very good deal. My apartment was 480 Euros and it was a very small studio in the 13<sup>th</sup> district. If you want something near campus in St. Germain des Pres, expect to pay at least 600, more 700. You can also apply for CAF and you should (application online, do it early, as soon as you get your carte de sejour). It will take off about 200 Euros off your rent depending on your income (not your parents') – thank you French government.



## Classes

- They have a month long Stage d'Integration, optional but recommended. However, you have to pay extra. Housing in Cite U is provided for that month (for which you also have to pay of course). Basically, you take French courses and some Methodology courses. They have a group of French students that take you out and organize various activities with you. Good way to adjust before regular courses begin and to meet some other international students. We became really close with my Stage class. It's about 6 weeks during the month of September. Regular classes start in October.

- Class size varies. Cours Magistraux are usually huge, 100-200 people, while Conferences are smaller, 20-30 people. Electives or classes taught in English vary; some can be as small as 15 people or as big as 50 people.



- Sciences-Po is famous for its great professors. They can be journalists, writers, or politicians. You probably won't know who the big guy is that everyone wants, so talk to some French kids and they will let you know.

- Sciences-Po is not known for its diversity in classroom, even though they have been trying to change that lately. You will mostly see middle to high class white boys and girls sitting next to you, even though International students tend to add some diversity.

- Course difficulty really depends on your professor. The minimum you will have to do is a midterm and a final (4-hour one-question written exam is most common). Expose is a trademark of Sciences-Po especially "loved" by international students. Having a good level of French is definitely a bonus, but they also have good choice of classes taught in English.

- I could only find one course that would count for my major requirement, so most of my courses ended up being electives. However, I found that I could take classes that do not exist at GT, like Middle Eastern Politics or Religion and Society. Basically, you have a good chance of finding something that interests you either in your major (if it is Economics, PS, or IA) or outside of it. They have a

lot of foreign languages offered as well. I took Arabic for example. You just have to take a placement test, which can be rather tough.

- Your main courses are usually split up into two parts, cours magistral and conference. CM is just a lecture, while conference is a more personal small course, often made up of just the international students where one has to participate and make presentations (exposes).

- Almost every course except for electives has a final exam. The worst-case scenario is a 4-hour written exam on which your CM grade will be based on. For some courses you have a midterm (galope) and a final. They usually ask a rather general question but it is best to really know your stuff.

- The quality of the language courses depends on the professor. My first semester was a complete waste of time, while the second term I enjoyed it. Make sure to take a placement test, there are 4 levels and it is hard to move up between semesters, so try to do your best or you will get stuck in a level too low for you. French language classes are only once a week, so you are not going to get much out of them, but really, it is up to you. They often give you good tips about how to write an essay in French or prepare for an expose, so pay attention.

- Grades are on a scale of 1 to 20. You will never get a 19 or a 20, no one does. If you get a 12, be happy, most French kids are. It was pretty easy to get a 10. If you apply yourself and do your reading, you will probably get a 15.

- Your course load is mostly up to you. I took five courses and I did not feel like it was too much. Some courses have to be taken in pairs (CM and conference) so account for that.



\* These comments do not reflect the views of GT's Office of International Education.. They are based on students' individual opinions and are, therefore not necessarily representative of all student experiences.

## Transportation & Travel

- Metro! Get an Imagine R card if you are staying for a year, which will cost you about 30E per month. It will also give you free transportation in all 6 zones on the weekends, great for day trips to Versailles, Fontainebleau or whatever you feel like. Starting this July they also put together a great bike system where you can rent bikes anywhere in the city and drop them off anywhere you want. You pay a certain subscription, first 30-minutes are free, I am too sad I missed that! But my advice to you, take a walk! Paris is most beautiful when you just walk. Yeah, your imagine R card also works for buses, which can be a more fun way to discover a city.
- For regional travel, you can go by train or plane, but for France train is more convenient. You can get a special card for young people if you plan to travel by train a lot, it will give you some discounts. Check SNCF websites for special deals. I went to Lyon for 25E!
- Around Paris: Pontoise and Auvers-sur-Oise (Van Gogh lived there), Fontainebleau forest. Giverny is beautiful but is sooo touristy!
- Around France: Major cities like Lyon and Toulouse are my favorites. Montpellier is a great college town perfect for a long weekend. Smaller villages are worth discovering as well. I really enjoyed visiting castles on the Loire, make sure to visit at least a couple. If you are doing Stage d'Integration, Sciences Po will organize a couple of trips like that, take advantage of them – good way too make some friends and very good deal money wise. If you get an opportunity to do a wine tour in Burgundy or Bordeaux, or anywhere for that matter, don't even hesitate!



## Packing

- Pack the bare minimum; you can buy things you need once you get there.
- Check out the flea markets, a cultural experience in itself.



## Food

- In general food is expensive but can be found everywhere. As far as university food, there are two cafeterias at Sciences-Po that mostly serve sandwiches and salads (2.5E-3E)- cheap and convenient but can get old after awhile. Resto U is a 10-minute walk, at Mabillon, where you can get a hot meal for 2.75E.
- To save money try to cook at home, buying stuff in open-air markets was a good deal and a fun cultural experience. Being called a princess might be weird at first, but just smile and nod - they will stop eventually.
- For going out, Greek and Turkish Kebab places found everywhere are probably the best deal, but not so great for your health. Crepe stands are just about everywhere as well. To go out to a real restaurant, expect to pay 15E, 25E for a nicer meal with wine. Try to avoid touristy areas like St. Michel, it might seem cheap, but the quality is not that great. If you happen to live in a non-touristy area, try to discover some local restos, ask a local, you will eat the best food for the least amount of money.
- Since there is no real campus, the two cafeterias is all you have. But since you are in the middle of Paris, you have quite a variety of choices near by. Rue st. Andre-des Arts has a lot of restos. However, it is St. Germain des Pres, so expect to pay quite a bit. Mabillon resto u is convenient.



## Lifestyle

- It is easier to meet International students than French ones, but it depends on how communicative you are. Most of my French friends were not from Sciences-Po and you will understand why once you get there.
- I socialized with Americans, other international students, and local students. Try to avoid other Americans if you plan on really improving your French. They tend to speak English all the time.
- There are on-campus conferences organized every week. They have numerous clubs and organizations. They will have a week where they will present their tables in the Peniche.
- If you like theater, check out Kiosque Jeune (there are 2 locations) for reduced price theatre and concert tickets and free invitations. Paris has over 200 theatres and I wish I found out about this earlier and not 2 months before I left.



## Cultural Differences

- Just be open minded about things and do not overanalyze it.

## Communication

- Cell phones are more expensive than here. To have a subscription, you have to have your bank account open in France. Sometimes prepaid is better, that is what I used. They do not really have the free nights and weekends. Using text messages is the most convenient and cheap way to communicate. Incoming calls and messages are free. Choosing a company, there is Orange, Bouygues, and a third one. Your American phone will not work, unless you have one of those global phones.
- Sciences Po has several computer labs, but they tend to be full in the afternoons, and they are only open until 7PM, so having Internet at home is more convenient.
- How often you keep in touch with family & friends depends on how motivated you are. Make sure not to neglect your friendships, sometimes support from home can be really important.

## Participant Profiles

Please see information of contributing students below. If a blog or website is listed, feel free to take a look! Also, if an e-mail address is listed, you may contact that student if you have any questions about their study abroad experience.

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## Finances

- I spent a lot! It is really hard to predict. Going out is expensive, so if you like going out, you are out of luck.
- STARS scholarship is a pretty good thing to do. I had some other outside scholarships. I also had to take out a small loan to help me pay for the expenses.
- Try to not use your American credit card, fees will apply. Get a bank account as soon as you get there. They will have several ones offered to you during the Stage. If you have a Bank of America account here, you can withdraw money without extra fees from any BNP ATM.