Exchange Report – University of Lausanne in Switzerland (Fall 2018)

From: A French Cohort student, Major in Political Science and Extended Minor in French

Preparation for exchange

Preparing for your exchange, you need to be mindful of a few things.

To figure out your study plan at Lausanne, you can find the courses on the University website on a webpage called Programmes offered at the UNIL: Timetable. You can then select the faculty in which you are studying and there you will see the different subjects that are offered in this faculty. In Lausanne, they divide their Bachelor’s degree into two sections: the first year and second part (second and third year). Usually, first year classes are 100 level and the rest can be 200 or 300. Another thing to be mindful of is that their credits are worth half of ours. So for example, 2 credits at University of Lausanne are worth 1 SFU credit. You might then be required to take more than you usually do at SFU (over 4-5 classes) at the same time to accumulate a reasonable amount of credits.

For packing, make sure to bring clothes for some warm weather as well as for cold weather. The summer weather there lasted until end of October while I was there so I appreciated the fact that I had brought short sleeve shirts and shorts. A few items I would recommend bringing: a rain coat, running shoes (you will definitely want to hike in Switzerland and use the beautiful sport facility at the University), all your important academic and immigration documents (i.e. a copy of your visa application, your transcript). If you can, bring a great cabin luggage that you will also be able to use as you go on trips all around Europe, but be careful because their cabin luggage dimensions are smaller than American standards! Try not to overpack as you will probably want to have space to bring back gifts for everyone you love back home (and for yourself of course).

To apply for your Visa, my only advice to give you is to apply as early as you can. This is very important. The Consulate General of Switzerland in Vancouver website said that it took 8-10 weeks to process a Visa application. However, it took them 4 months to process mine and that delay caused me a bunch of complications and I had to travel all the way to Paris to pick up my Visa there. Visit the Consulate’s website, prepare all the necessary documentation and mail it as early as you can so you have time to receive it before your departure. Do not procrastinate on this one!

For finances, definitely book an appointment with your banking institution in Canada to figure out the best option for how you will handle your money. What I did was open a bank account in Switzerland to which I transferred money through Global Money Transfer so I could avoid any kind of fees. However, the closing of this bank account had a fee (50 Swiss francs for me). So it is smart to look at all your options with your Canadian banking institution.
**During Exchange**

When you arrive in Lausanne, you will already have received emails from SASME (the University’s exchange office) on what to do when you arrive, so refer to that checklist. Visit their office in the 1-3 days following your arrival and they will help you with everything you need to do, such as getting your residence permit at the Commune (municipal office).

School-wise, make sure to book an appointment with an advisor to discuss your course selections if in doubt, and don’t forget to sign up for your classes and exams before the respective deadlines to avoid their 200 francs fee.

I would recommend going to Lausanne for two semesters or go for the Spring term if only for one semester because their exam sessions for the Fall term is in mid-January, so if you want to come back to SFU for the Spring term, they **DO NOT** make any arrangements whatsoever for you to take your exams outside of their exam sessions.

The city of Lausanne is absolutely beautiful, I would recommend visiting the Cathedral and going all the way up to get a beautiful view of the city as well as visiting the Olympic Museum (Lausanne is the Olympic capital!). It is also a great city for shopping and going out for food and drinks. I would also recommend visiting the many beautiful cities of the country, such as Geneva, Zurich, Bern, Basel, Gruyère, Montreux, etc. If you choose to do so, it is a great idea to purchase the train’s “demi-tarif” to get all your train tickets at half price.

What is great about Lausanne is that the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) committee organizes at least 3 events per week for exchange students, such as ski trips, hiking trips, pub nights, museum visits, train rallies, etc. These are a huge benefit and participating to those events is definitely worth it.

**Reflection After Exchange**

As much as you will prepare for this exchange, a lot of unexpected events will happen to you and you will get to learn about how to deal with those. Not everything will be easy and go as planned, so remember that your experience is unique and like no one else's. All I need to say is: enjoy every single moment. Enjoy every meal (the Geopolis cafeteria has the BEST cafeteria food I have ever witnessed), every mountain sight, every sunny day, every encounter you come across, and every event you participate to. The University of Lausanne is a wonderful university and anyone who has the chance to be a part of it is extremely lucky. Bonus: Swiss people are super nice and very Canadian-friendly.
The beautiful university campus during the fall. You can see the French Alps from there.
The view of Lausanne from the top of its Cathedral.

Another view of Lausanne.
The University’s newest building, Geopolis, where I had most of my classes.
A hike (Rochers de Naye) organized by the ESN committee for exchange students.