I recently participated in an exchange to Université François-Rabelais de Tours in France, from Fall 2016 to Spring 2017. I am in the French Cohort Program, majoring in French and minoring in Political Science.

**Preparation for exchange**

1. If you are majoring in French, I would highly recommend trying to get into the *les Tanneurs* or *St-Symphorien* residences. These are close to the main *lettres* (read arts) campuses, located just in front of *les Tanneurs*, and are located in safe locations. The former is small, and the rec room was still being renovated, but has the convenience of being located downtown. *St-Symphorien* is a tram and bus-ride away from *les Tanneurs*. Another good residence would be *Fac Grandmont*. Send your residence applications early!

2. I would recommend coming up with a list of items to bring with you on exchange. Bring sunscreen, a copy of your visa and passport, and water with you.

3. As for training from Paris Charles de Gaulle to Tours, I would recommend buying your ticket at the station. Security can be very slow at the airport, and I had to take a taxi to the train station in order to try to not miss my train. I missed my train anyways as I was lost at the station, and had to buy another ticket!

4. Do not be confused when you’re given two tickets to St-Pierre-des-Corps et Tours. The former is on the TGV (*train à grande vitesse*) network, and the latter is connected to St-Pierre-des-Corps with a shuttle train.

5. The cost of living is somewhat comparable to Vancouver. I received an Erasmus+ scholarship to travel and live. If this is you, congratulations! Expect to spend about 600 euros per month if you are going to live frugally, and much more if you plan to go out and travel (upwards to 800 to 1000 euros per month). Rent is about 300-400 euros per month, food would be 50-150 euros (depending on if you cook for yourself, if you’re eating rice and lentils or baguettes vs going out to eat), going out can be 200 euros per month if you’re enjoying the nightlife, travelling around the region, and buying souvenirs.

**During the exchange**

1. Make sure that you are aware of the address of the CROUS office where you’ll be picking up your keys. Be prepared to pay for first month’s rent. As for accommodation, you will be expected to keep your room tidy and clean.

2. France does not take debit cards, so be aware that you either must use your credit card or sign up for a *carte bleue*, or *carte bancaire*. These are two names for a credit card and debit card in one. A French bank account is necessary if you would like to have such a card, and it can come quite handy: for example, you can make automatic payments to your cellphone bill.

3. As for your cellphone bill, you can choose to buy a prepaid plan from Orange; I chose to get a 20-euro plan from Free that allowed me to call back home to Canada.
4. For food, the cheapest places you can get food would be Simply Market near the Gare de Tours, and Auchan in Tours Nord, both accessible via tram, if you are living in les Tanneurs. For convenience, there’s Carrefour City. For Saint-Symphorien and Fac Grandmont, there’s grocery stores nearby. Again, eating baguettes and cheese would be cheaper than going out to eat.

5. Be sure to attend orientation, organised by the Direction des Relations internationales and Erasmus student club, ESN. Erasmus+ is the European Union’s program of exchanges, which now includes Canada. There you’ll meet lots of friends, as well as be introduced to the activities planned, which extend from going to Villeray and Ambroise castles, to visiting the Tuileries in Paris, and the seaside town of Nantes. They also planned a dinner of traditional French food!

6. Tandems are found at les Tanneurs campus as well, where you are matched with a French student who would like to practice their English. Sign up early, as spots are filled up quite quickly. You can also choose to teach English to several students. These Tandems are available for credit, if you choose to write a report on them.

7. Your course load is based on what you can find on the UFR website. Be sure to check when you have class on the Environnement numérique du travail (ENT) ’s emploi du temps (schedule), as class times can change frequently, especially at the beginning of the semester. You sign up for courses with your main professor correspondent, who will check that you are targeting the number of credits that you wish, and provide advice on courses based on your French level.

8. I highly recommend taking CUEFEE courses. You’ll also meet friends there. You take a short exam, about an hour, on your French writing ability. From there, you can take courses meant for foreigners. These courses are based on the Common European Framework for languages. I took C1-level courses, which introduced university-level writing and taught common oral expressions, and tested us on our knowledge of university-level writing and the oral eloquence of a recorded show.

9. For your courses in French, I would recommend taking only L1-level courses. These are introductory courses in literature or linguistics, and will help you become accustomed to the French university format. I also took electives in psychology, history, and nutrition, all of which were very interesting.

10. Grades are given over 20. Lectures can be one to two hours long, with a short break in between. You are expected to copy everything the professor says. Tutorials can be about oral exposés. It’s very helpful to ask a French classmate for their notes, as their notes are usually much more precise!

11. In order to not have to cram for your exams, study regularly.

12. Make sure that you are aware of what’s required for exchange credit applications. Start these applications early! Record information as soon as you can about what is required to transfer your credits to SFU.

*Enjoying your exchange in France*
1. Visit the region! There’s beautiful castles at Ambroise and other villages in the region. If you’re into biking, check out the Fil Bleu’s rental bike system. For 3 euros per month and a 300 or 500-euro deposit, you can have a bike to bike the town with. These bikes, however, are not recommended to go on trails. You can buy a bicycle at a low price at the bicycle exchange that happens in September.

2. Visit other places in France! I had friends who visited the south of France, and they thoroughly enjoyed it. Take the opportunity to travel to other places in Europe, as the flights are very cheap.

3. Enjoy the cuisine that France has to offer. By les Tanneurs is a bakery called Menuisier et fils, which offers fantastic discounts to students and has amazing pâtisseries, or baked goods. There’s also fantastic kebabs, or as we call them in Vancouver, donairs.

4. Don’t be afraid to show your talents! I performed a duet on the guitar with one of my roommates at one of ESN’s parties.

5. I would highly not recommend working while on an exchange. I worked on the side as an English Language Assistant in a primary school, and it was stressful juggling homework, and the pressures of work and going out.

6. Enjoy time with friends, roommates, and don’t be afraid to say hello!

Reflection after exchange

1. Remember that Tours, France is different from Vancouver, Canada. The latter is more cosmopolitan and ethnically diverse, whereas the former is more ethnically homogenous. Be prepared to stand out if you are not Caucasian.

2. There are some areas of town to avoid as a student at night. Ask about this early on.

3. Be sure to speak with your French roommates! They can be very friendly. Be sure to practice your French whenever you can.
Place du Grand Monstre - near les Tanneurs, and has many clothing and food shops. It’s near Les Halles, which has a bank and other shops.

A view of downtown from the Quai Paul Bert
Vieux Tours, or the old downtown

Gardens in one of the castles in the *Val de Loire* region