MY EXCHANGE SEMESTER – GRENOBLE, FRANCE

My name is Jill and I am currently finishing my last semester at SFU (Spring 2011). I am majoring in Business Administration. I applied to attend exchange for the Fall 2010 semester to not only fulfill credits towards my Honours, but also to travel, improve my French, and break-away from the comfort of my home, in other words to challenge myself!

The exchange school I attended in Fall 2010 was Grenoble Ecole de Management. More specifically, the program I was enrolled in was for a Certificate in International Business, which is provided under a branch of Grenoble Ecole de Management called Grenoble Graduate School of Business (GGSB).

The program was taught in English and I was required to take 7 classes: 5 mandatory, previously set classes, 1 option class (of your choice), and 1 language class (French if you are not a fluent French speaker, or German, Spanish or Chinese if you are fluent in French). It is important to note that if you have previously taken some of the classes offered in the semester you are attending GGSB you can swap the mandatory classes for option classes. However, you may need to take more option classes due to the fact that an option class is 3ECTS (1 SFU credit), while full GGSB classes are often 6ECTS (3 SFU credits).

Overall I had a great semester full of learning, traveling, and making new friends. I really enjoyed this school and the city of Grenoble. I would definitely recommend attending GGSB on an exchange program if you have the chance.

Now that you have a little more understanding about the school, I will provide you some wisdom around pre-departure to GGSB and France, and what life is like while attending GGSB.

PRE-DEPARTURE:

BOOKING YOUR FLIGHT:

I would recommend booking your flight as soon as you have confirmation of your acceptance from GGSB. You need confirmation of flights when applying for your VISA so doing this as soon as possible is beneficial. I would consider Air Canada because they have a great baggage policy and when you return home you will probably need the generous weight allowance and relaxed restrictions.

STUDENT VISA:

You need to apply for the Long Term Student Visa. You can find all the information you need online. Some of the things you need to put in the package are: repatriation insurance, health
insurance, flight information, acceptance letters, passport pictures, sufficient funds proof, etc. The cost is free however you may need to pay for photo-copies and passport pictures. Make sure to make your appointment to get your VISA as soon as possible, the slots fill up fast. Also, it is important to remember to set up an account with Campus France before you go to the French Embassy to get your VISA (again this can be done online). There is also a Campus France representative located in the Education Wing at SFU.

ACCOMMODATIONS:

I would recommend you arrange your accommodations before you arrive in Grenoble, however upon arrival GGSB has a great student organization (ALOHA) that can help you find accommodations. I would recommend applying to live in the EUROPOLE residence. It is located 2 min from the school. Most places in France require a guarantor, however, Europole does not which is a plus. Here are some important things to known about Europole:

- Europole requires a wire transfer for all payments until you have set up a bank account in France, so make sure you have the ability to make wire transfers before signing the contract.
- A room in Europole costs about €615 a month, and it is located 2 min from the school. I would recommend asking for a room in the "A" building on a higher level floor (ex. the 8th floor) because these rooms have beautiful views.

View from my window on the 8th floor
GGSB PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION:

GGSB requires you to send in a separate application on top of the one you provided SFU. It is important to note that more references are needed and statements of interest. The staff at GGSB are very helpful so if you have any questions email one of the student coordinators. They all speak English and were able to answer all my questions. Also, make sure to join the GGSB Facebook Group. There are often posts regarding roommate requests or books being sold.

MONEY:

I recommend you only bring Euros. Once you open your bank account you can transfer your money into this account. Also, remember to tell your local bank at home that you are leaving the country so your VISA or Client Card continues to work. It is very difficult to unlock your account once in France if your bank assumes you have unusual activity.

PACKING:

Pack light! You will think you need more then you do, but you don’t. I would recommend you do bring a range of clothing; the weather can be very warm or very cold.
ONCE IN FRANCE

GETTING TO GRENOBLE:

Grenoble does have an airport but it is rarely open. I would recommend either flying into Paris, Lyon or Geneva airport. From these airports there are direct buses or trains that go to Grenoble Gare, the train station. The school is only a 5 min walk from the train station. If you exit the train station from the back exit you can walk under the train tracks and the school is on your left behind the “World Trade Centre”.

ARRIVING TO YOUR NEW APARTMENT:

If you do decide to live in EUROPOLE the room comes with the basics; fridge, stove, desk, chair, table and bed. However you will need to pick up some small things, for example: bedding, lamps, cooking utensils, plates, etc. There is a big IKEA located in Grenoble which is a great way to pick up all the things you need for a reasonable price.

SETTING UP A FRENCH BANK ACCOUNT:

It is mandatory to set up a bank account when you are a student in France. You need to set up a bank account because you are required to obtain a cheque book to pay for your French Health Insurance. This insurance costs €200, even if you stay one semester. Another reason
why you need to set up a local bank account is because you need to obtain an R.I.B. number (an international bank account number) to pay for rent, utilities, and to access the government subsidy (CAF) provided to students who live in France. CAF is a reduction on your accommodation fee and can be set up at the Welcome Desk during Orientation Week.

I would recommend opening an account with the LCL Bank. This bank has a great student deal. It costs about €2 to open an account and get housing insurance. Once your account is open, you can either make a wire transfer to put money into your French bank account, or you can deposit cash. Most of the people working at the bank speak French. If you can find a French speaking friend to help you when opening your account this would be beneficial. If you do not speak French or cannot find someone to accompany you to the bank, the welcome desk can also help you set up your account.

**ORIENTATION:**

I would recommend attending orientation. At GGSB the orientation is set up by the group ALOHA. There are many sessions to attend in which invaluable information is provided regarding housing, classes, the school, and French culture. Also, there are many fun social events that are also put on by ALOHA. The orientation is usually one week long, therefore, classes do not commence until orientation week is complete. This is usually around the 17th of the starting month.

**GGSB CLASSES:**

As an exchange student you are put into one of three groups within the GGSB program. The program I was placed in was called BIB 3A; this stands for: Bachelors in International Business Third Year. Even though you will be a CIB exchange student (1 semester - Certificate in International Business) you are placed into groups with the full year BIB students.

These groups are the groups you will be with for the entire semester and attend all your 5 mandatory classes with. These groups consist of about 30 students. You can find which group you are in from a sign posted outside the Undergrad office on the 3rd floor of the GGSB building wing. Because your group stays together throughout the semester you can make really good friends and you feel comfortable when talking in class.

Most of the classes are taught by teachers that the school has flown in from different countries. Also, for one class you can have up to 3 teachers teaching you throughout the semester. The classes mostly consist of interactive seminars and group work. Furthermore, the class schedules are previously set by the school and this schedule can be found through your “MyGGSB” account.

To access your account (http://students.grenoble-em.com/Pages/Default.aspx) the school will send you an email with your password and ID code. It is important to note that the class schedule can change weekly, therefore always check your schedule Sunday night before the
week starts (don’t print out all your weeks of class before hand). Also, all classes are taught in English, except the language class of course. Furthermore, there is no bookstore located in the school therefore you need to order your books online, for example, through Amazon.fr.

| GRENOBLE LIVING: |

Grenoble is a small town so you can pretty much walk everywhere. If you do want to travel using the local tram a “one trip” ticket costs about €1.20. Make sure you validate it before you get on the tram.

![The City of Grenoble](image)

Located in Grenoble you will find everything you need. As a student, the most important is probably where you can buy cheap food. There is a great grocery store called Gèant Casino. This is a large supermarket located 10min by tram from the school. Gèant Casino is like a Walmart, it has good quality inexpensive food. It is also a great place to pick up school supplies and a printer.

Everyday living expenses in Grenoble will vary depending on how much you go out and how much food you eat. Some of my expenses were: 1) €45 a week on food; 2) €615 a month on rent; 3) €50 on electricity a month; and 4) €20 for a month of unlimited texting. In regards to a cell phone, if you have a phone that can work overseas you can just buy France SIM card. If you do not have a phone you can buy one from the local provider for €20-€30 minimum and get a pay-as-you-go plan.
TRAVELING:

If you want to travel while on exchange in Grenoble there are many places to go. Within France itself you can take the TGV to many beautiful cities. For example: Anncey, Paris, Marseille, or Lyon. If you want to travel further by plane I would recommend London, Rome, Budapest, and Dublin. All of these can be done in a weekend trip.

When booking travels by train from Grenoble use the online site, http://www.voyages-sncf.com/, and when traveling by plane I would recommend using EasyJet because out of Lyon (which is the main airport closest to Grenoble) there are many flights at reasonable prices.

Also I would consider getting a Carte 12-25 card. This card gives you up to 40% discounts on your train travels within France and to some other places within Europe. It is a great way to save money and you can pick it up at the local train station in Grenoble. It is around €40 and a passport photo is required.

CONCLUSION

Overall, from going on exchange I have learned a lot about myself and what I want to do with my future. It is challenging to live on your own, especially in a country where English is a second language, but you just need to keep your end goal in mind and ask for help when you need it.

The main thing to keep in mind when arriving in Grenoble (something I wish I knew before I left) is: in Grenoble everything is slow and things are never open when you want them to be. Therefore don’t get mad when you want to go to the bank or the grocery store at lunch when
you have a break but it is closed. Become one with the French culture: eat cheese and white bread, try to speak as much French as possible, and just relax.