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Report: École Normale Supérieure exchange 2012-2013

Academics/Courses information

I was the ENS exchange student, *pensionnaire étrangère* status, in 2012-2013. I arrived in France in early September 2012 for the ENS Orientation scheduled for the 11th of September 2012. The first semester began in early October 2012 at the ENS, but in late September at different universities around Paris. Unfortunately, there is no central database that provides information for the different academic calendars or course listing. It is necessary to be fairly proactive in order to obtain information with regards to courses and faculty from the different institutions in and around Paris. When I arrived at the ENS, I was under the impression that I would be assigned an advisor at Ulm, who would help me organize my time there and point me in the right direction for courses and faculty. However, that was not the case. I was able to speak with a faculty member of the ENS at the beginning of the year who helped me determine what courses I might be interested in outside of the ENS, but I did not maintain a relationship with her for the remainder of the academic year. The course listing at the ENS is well organized in a book that the students receive upon arrival, but information regarding courses and events outside of the ENS are not easy to navigate.

As an ENS *pensionnaire étrangère*, I was able to audit classes not only in the ENS, but also at other locations, such as the Maison de la Recherche de la Sorbonne, the Sorbonne (Paris IV and Paris III) or the Institut National de l'Histoire de l'Art (INHA). In order to do so, I contacted the faculty directly, explained that I was a *pensionnaire étrangère* at the ENS and was able to sit in on their classes. All the professors I contacted were happy to have me audit. Through the contact with some of these professors, I was able to sign up for certain mailing lists which provided important information about conferences, *journées d'études* and other events happening in different institutions in and around Paris. I was able to attend several conferences of interest to my dissertation topic and, through contacts at NYU, I was invited to participate in a

journée d'études occurring at the NYU-in-Paris center. Thanks to contacts made at another conference, I was also invited to develop an article I had presented, that will soon, hopefully, be published in a literary review from the Université de Poitiers.

Library privileges

The ENS provides exchange students with a card that gives access to the library at the École Normale Supérieure. *Pensionnaires étranger/ères* have the same library lending privileges as ENS students, meaning they can take books out (up to 20 at one given time, as I recall) of the ENS library and can keep them for 6-8 weeks, with the possibility of renewal, unless they are recalled by a third party, at which point the book must be returned. Being able to take books out of the library is very uncommon in French libraries, and therefore a privilege for *pensionnaires étranger/ères*. Additionally, the library at Ulm is excellent and I hardly felt the need to use other libraries. I did pay for a year-long Bibliothèque Nationale de France card, which gave me access to all the branches of the BNF. I believe it cost approximately 30 euros for the year. In order to get the card, it is necessary to show proof of being a *pensionnaire étranger/ère* at the ENS. It may be a good idea, therefore, for the ENS exchange student to travel with a letter of recommendation (*Attestation*) from his/her advisor indicating what sort of research he/she will be doing and as proof that they will require a BNF card to conduct their research while in France. There is a link to a standard form for the *Attestation* on the website for the BNF, under the new membership page.

There are computer rooms in the main complex where students can print work. Printing requires, however, that the student bring his/her own paper. The school provides the ink, but the student must provide the paper. There are also a few scanners scattered in the library that can be used by students.

Logistical information: Room

The ENS exchange student is provided with a room in one of the on-location dorms, either across the street from the main ENS-Ulm building, or inside the main complex. They are allowed to arrive as early as early September and must vacate the room by late June/early July.

The room includes a bed, a desk, a closet, shelves and a sink. Toilets and showers are down the hall and are coed. Each level also has a kitchen that is shared between the residents of that floor (approximately 20-25 students, I would guess).

Students are responsible for bringing their own linens and kitchen supplies. They are also responsible for cleaning their rooms (there is a communal vacuum and mop) and for maintaining the kitchen organized and clean. The halls, bathrooms and kitchen are cleaned once a day (weekdays) by housekeeping staff and the fridge is emptied/cleaned twice a month, approximately.

The dorms are equipped with Internet (wifi and plugin) and laundry facilities. Students living in the dorm are also required to pay for room insurance during their time there.

Logistical information: Beginning of year Orientation

All information regarding room insurance, health services, access to the internet in the rooms and in the library, the library card and bank account information is dealt with on the day of Orientation scheduled at the beginning of the academic year, in mid-September. The day of Orientation is organized by the *Direction des Relations Internationales* at the ENS and is targeted towards *pensionnaires étrangers* and Erasmus students coming from all over Europe. There are many Erasmus students at the ENS in any given semester and they are generally in their early 20s. The *pensionnaires étrangers* vary greatly in age, but tend to be PhD students and in their mid-to-late 20s and early 30s.

In 2012-2013, the person in charge of the Orientation and director of the *Relations Internationales* was Mme Isabelle de Vendevre. During the summer prior to the year at the ENS, the *pensionnaire étranger* will be asked to fill out several forms for *Relations Internationales* and write a *lettre de motivation*, in preparation for their arrival at the ENS.

The first day of Orientation is followed by a week of Orientation sponsored by the different departments at the ENS, as a way of presenting the different parts of the school to all incoming students (*pensionnaires étrangers* and Erasmus, but mainly their own incoming *élèves* and *étudiants*).

Logistical information: Meal plan

The ENS card can also work as a meal card. The student will add money to the card, which can be used in the cafeteria or café of the ENS. Breakfast, lunch and dinner (brunch on weekends) is served and ENS card holders pay approximately 1.5 euros for breakfast and 3.5 euros for lunch or dinner. Lunch and dinner include an “entrée” (appetizer), a main dish and dessert (or two entrées and a main dish or two desserts and a main dish). Any additional items will be paid for separately.

Logistical information: Health Services

Health Services are located in the main building and there are two doctors students can schedule visits with. There are also two nurses who live in the building across the street from the main complex and are on call for emergencies or simply as psychological support to students.

Logistical information: Extracurricular activities at the ENS

Students can sign up for the COF (Comité d’Organisation des Fêtes) for a 50 euro fee for the academic year and have access to many extracurricular activities organized by different groups at the ENS. For example, I was a member of the Bureau des Arts and was able to go with a group from the ENS on a private tour of the costume shop of the Comédie française, as well as one of the dress rehearsals for an opera at the Opéra Garnier. I also went to a few of the sessions of the ENS’s Club d’Oenologie and went on a weekend trip to visit the chateaux of the Loire Valley. There are many other clubs and activities available to students who are at the ENS and *pensionnaires étrangers/ères* are welcome to partake in them. At the beginning of the year, the COF organizes the MEGA, a trip that is meant for the incoming students at the ENS, and takes students to a surprise location for a long weekend before classes begin. I did not go on this trip, but several of the *pensionnaires étrangers* that I knew did go and enjoyed it.

Logistical information: Student discounts

France has excellent discounts for students who are under 26 or 28 years of age (depends on the institution or organization).

Train: With regard to transportation, the SNCF has a carte 12-28, which provides at least 50%, and often up to 60% discount on train tickets. You must apply for this card by the eve of your 29th birthday, in order to benefit from the discounts.

Paris public transportation (RATP): The carte ImagineR is excellent for students who are under 26 years of age. You must purchase a year-long pass, but it allows you to travel within the Paris public transportation system (metro/bus/tram/RER) freely. There are advantages to having a card, as well, as weekends and holidays are “dézonés”, meaning that you can travel anywhere in the 5 zones, at no additional cost. This includes travel to the airports on weekends (usually 10 euros, on average, to either Charles de Gaulle or Orly airports). For students who are older, they can invest in a carte Navigo and pay for a week pass, a month pass or a year pass. If that is unnecessary or unwanted, there are books of 10 individual tickets+ that allow travel on buses, RER, metro and trams (transfer from bus-bus is allowed for 1.5h from the time of boarding on the first bus; transfer from metro to RER is allowed; transfer from metro to bus or RER to bus is not allowed). For students who are under 26 and opt for the individual tickets, note that there are tickets jeunes available as well as day tickets (mobilis) at reduced rates.

Paris museums: all national government-owned museums are FREE on the first Sunday of each month (lines are generally long). Additionally, there are days such as the Nuit Blanche (October) or the journées du patrimoine (September) when everyone can access certain venues for free (I visited the Collège des Bernardins, the Institut du Monde Arabe and l'Élysée, for example, during these events). Otherwise, during normal hours there are generally student discounts, but you must be younger than a certain age (varies depending on the venue—usually 26/28 or 30).

Other cultural venues (theater, ballet, opera, cinema, etc): Often there are student discounts available, but you must be younger than a certain age (varies depending on venue—usually 26/28 or 30) to obtain them. There are also rush tickets available at the Opéra Bastille and at the Comédie française (5 euro tickets, if you are willing to stand in line for 1.5 hours prior

to the show), for example. Inform yourself before buying full-price tickets. The Opéra Garnier does not do rush tickets, as far as I could tell, but you can get discount tickets or use the Bureau des Arts at the ENS as a resource and a way to get discounted tickets to performances. The main drawback about the BdA is that it's *tirage au sort* and you may sign up for an event, but if there are only 12 spots and 30 people sign up, they will draw the 12 names out of a hat.

My recommendation: **ALWAYS CARRY YOUR ENS OR BC ID WITH YOU AND ALWAYS MAKE SURE TO ASK IF THERE ARE STUDENT DISCOUNTS**—you never know if there might be. Often, they are not advertised, but if you ask, they will give you a reduced rate.
