EXPERIENCE REPORT FOR THE EXCHANGE SEMESTER-SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 2017

1. When, where and for how long have you been an Erasmus student?

I used to study at Polytech Tours in France, from September until December 2017.

2. The country and its characteristics

I used to study in Tours, Indre-et-Loire department. Tours is a small city located in the centre-west of France. It is the administrative centre of the Indre-et-Loire department and the largest city in the Centre-Val de Loire region of France. The region is famous with its outstanding castles. It hosts the highest number of castles among all the other regions in France. While Tours is considered, quite, urban with a beautiful medieval architecture, particularly in the city-centre, it takes quite long commutes, from the city-centre, to reach the university, which is located in the suburbs, approximately 45min by tramway. Public transport network is a little bit limited. The city does not have any metro lines, expect one tramway line, therefore, people are relying particularly on busses. People in France tend to be very friendly and fun-loving, for example, they love eating outside not only on weekends but also during the week and they enjoy drinking local wine with family members and friends. I had the impression also that French people are always well dressed and very passionate about fashion. They are also passionate about culture, reading novels and art, in general.

3. Academic advising

At the international office, the coordinator was very helpful. He tried to get me listed for all the activities I wanted and explained to me the various facilities that Polytech Tours can offer. They offer a special discount for certain cultural activities, cinema, gym, museums, etc...for only 5 euros per semester. However, places for gym were limited, so by the time I arrived there, tickets were already sold out. However, at least, at the international desk, they showed me where I could find cheap subscriptions. We used to receive also, every update about exchange student meeting, party or visits to castles, museums and so on.

4. Language Proficiency

Though I was already used to study in English at Leibniz University of Hannover, I definitely improved my academic and every-day-English since also, in France, lectures were taught in English, and because we used to be within an international atmosphere and hang out with international students. When it comes to proficiency in French, it was an opportunity to me to speak in French, since I am bilingual in French. In the daily life, everything was easier to me, since I did not have any language barrier. It was not the case in Germany, because I can barely communicate in German.
5. Recommendation

I would definitely recommend a semester abroad at Polytech Tours with some exceptions. The workload was high; we had to write 12 short reports (9 to 20 pages) within three months. What makes it a lot easier is that most assignments will give you a set of questions from which you may pick one, so you do not have to come up with a topic on your own. On the other hand, it was quite stressful and complicated for exchange students; because the exchange program was only offering 26 credit points, whereas we were required to earn 30 credit points. Therefore, we had to discuss some administrative issues with the university administration and with our professors, so they could, at the end, offer as a special assignment, but, which, was not very interesting for us.

6. Food at the University

Food at on-campus restaurants and cafés is normally priced for German standards. You will find the cheapest lunch-deals at the Polytech student restaurant. There are many options for vegetarians and vegans. They offer also cheap lunch deals for menus, including salad, the main meal, fruit and dessert for only 3 euros.

7. Public transport

It is definitely recommendable to buy a bike while in Tours, because the city's public transport system could be better. You can find a bike for under 100 Euro. Otherwise, you can take the tramway to the university which takes 45min (with bike, it takes only 20min). With your student card, you can get a student transport card (a monthly prepaid card for bus and tramway services which costs 26 euros). Bus schedules are very reliable but if you live in the city centre, it will be complicated to reach the university by bus, but it could be used for other commutes.

8. Living

I found my room before I moved to France. Our university and the university in France facilitated it beforehand. We applied for a couple of options for dorms and we got a confirmation from one of them. The room was super nice located in a very vibrant and beautiful neighbourhood, right in the middle of the old city of Tours where all shops, restaurants and bars are located. The view from my room was super beautiful, upon the medieval streets and buildings. The room, in itself, was also very clean and good, including my own shower and toilette, for only 264 euros. Whereas, if you apply for CAF (social aid association), they give a special aid to every student (citizens and foreigners). So, at the end, you will be, only, paying around 170 euros, monthly, which is very cheap for German and French standards.
9. Culture and Leisure time

Tours has a lot of museums and memorial sites and is surrounded by numerous castles—perfect for history buffs. There is a lot to learn about the conquerors and the kings who crossed in and out of the region. Tours has a thriving restaurant and bars culture where you can taste the best authentic French meals and wine.

10. Financial situation

Aside from my monthly rent (264Euro), I spent about 400 Euro on food, transportation and leisure.