Practical Advice

Visa
I did not need to apply for a visa because I have UK citizenship.

Packing
There was little that I forgot that I could not purchase in Paris. The only thing I regret not bringing is a suit which I needed for presentations throughout the semester. I would recommend packing light when going abroad. For me at least, I have a 50lb limit for luggage coming back to the States so I had to limit what I purchase/bring back etc.

Arrival
With a UK passport immigration was really easy for me. I had a buddy assigned to me during the weeks leading up to my arrival in Paris and she was very available to help me out/answer any questions. The IESEG orientation was very helpful in acclimating the students to the school and Paris, and also did a good job in integrating the incoming exchange students with the French students. The only thing I can think of that would improve the orientation would be to spend more time talking about the course enroll process because we were left to figure it out ourselves and that proved very difficult.

Academics

The University
IESEG is located in La Defense, which is Paris’ main financial center and is located just outside the city. IESEG is contained in one main building and two adjacent smaller ones. Classes take place in both buildings and each is equipped with wifi and computer labs. Social activities take place throughout the year and are organized by the international club.

Courses
To enroll in classes the exchange students are told to look at a list of courses and select based on the course name and description. Once a course list is compiled the student meets with an academic coordinator to confirm the schedule and work out any conflicts. The final grade assessment varies per class. Some classes such as the intensives rely only on one assessment—normally a presentation, a final exam or a combination of the two. Grades for extensive courses are usually based on several different assessments such as essays and group work that normally culminates in some sort of exam.

Life Abroad

Costs
Costs obviously vary a lot per person. I lived in the 14th district which happens to be far from La Defense and as a result I took the metro each morning. Because of that I paid for a monthly subway pass. I also found housing through the website Airbnb instead of living in the IESEG dorms. One of many upsides to having my own small place is that I was able to save a lot of money by cooking for myself. Approximate monthly cost in $USD: housing $900; food $500-700; transportation $75; misc $200-300.

Language
The language barrier was the hardest part of living in Paris. I had a few years of high school French but in reality that did not help much. I was lucky enough to have some friends in Paris who were part of other programs that fluently spoke French but on my own it was tough. I would strongly recommend taking a language course before going abroad. There was no “crash course” that I was aware of.

Banking
IESEG does a good job of helping the students set up French bank accounts. I did not set up an account because the fees for my American bank we not bad for use abroad, but if student was going to be abroad for the year I would recommend it.
Housing
As mentioned above I chose not to live in La Defense and found a really great apartment in the 14th for relatively cheap. I used Airbnb to get in contact with my landlord and it has proven to be one of the best decisions I have made in Paris. I really loved being in the city and closer to some existing friends I had coming in to the semester. My monthly rent was $900 including utilities. I paid my landlord through PayPal. Having my own kitchen was perfect for me because I really enjoy cooking for myself and there was a great supermarket on my block.

Transportation
I paid for a zone 1-3 monthly commuter pass for 76.50 euros a month and it was great because not only did I use it to get to school but also throughout the day to get anywhere in Paris. You can buy the passes at the main train stations. There are also buses and trams but I rarely used those.

Health and Safety
I felt very safe in my location and thankfully did not become sick or get hurt. Resources were available as needed.

Overall exchange experience

*The best thing about my semester abroad was:* Meeting new people and experiencing the city.

*The most challenging things about my semester abroad was:* The language barrier

*How did your semester abroad change your perspective?*
Going to an international school really changes your perspective about different cultures approach work and just how big the world really is.

*Tips for future students:*
Try everything you can, learn French and watch your bank account!