Practical Advice

Visa

The visa was only hard because it was a lot of paperwork, and involved a couple trips to New York City. Something you quickly learn is that the French administration is not the best, and it often takes a lot of time to complete everything. Although I didn’t use a majority of the paperwork I brought to the visa office, it is better to bring them just in case, as there is no set list of things they will ask you for. The whole process took about 2 months.

Packing

I brought a lot of clothes from home, but you will quickly realize that European style is a lot different than American, and you’re going to want to buy new clothes over here. A majority of people I know here, myself included, wish that we brought less clothing from home and embraced the style here more. Something I highly recommend bringing is any “snack food” that is very common in the US, but not here (for example, I brought a jar of peanut butter because it’s very expensive and hard to find here).

Arrival

I arrived at Charles de Gaulle (Paris) at 5am, so to me, immigration was a joke. They didn’t ask me a single question, nor did they look at my passport; he simply opened it, stamped it, and handed it back to me. Similar to most international programs, you’re assigned a buddy. Personally, I only met mine once for a few minutes, and that was it, however, I have friends that have buddies that I have used, and they’re extremely beneficial. The buddy system is very hit or miss, however you can always find a new buddy when you arrive. In terms of orientation, it was beneficial to an extent, however it seemed like many of the meetings applied only to students from X country, or students from the EU.

Academics

The University

IESEG is located in a beautiful part of Lille, near a major park called Le Citadelle de Lille. The campus is made up of 5 buildings, all within close proximity to each other. Each building has wifi that is accessible with your student ID. The academic schedule is similar to many North American schools, with 14 weeks of education and 2 weeks of holiday spread throughout the semester. Also, the school has a very helpful international office, since their international program is huge. Lille is also a very active social city, as a majority of the population is students. With that being said, there is always something to do, regardless of the night of the week.

Classes

To enroll, you have a meeting with a counselor and they place you in the courses. Final grade is based on participation, final exam, projects, or a mix (dependent upon course). Intensive courses meet every morning from 0830 to 1230 for 1 week, with a final on Friday morning. Extensive are spread throughout the semester.

Life Abroad

Language

Not knowing French made life challenging, but not impossible. Many people here can also speak English, so it’s quite easy to get around. I do, however, wish I took French before coming here. IESEG offers a course for international students to learn French, and I did learn a lot, however I wish I knew more.
Banking

I was told we were required to open a local bank for the electricity company (EDF), however I found out you don’t need to. Although I did open an account with Society General, you can still use your American bank account. However, keep in mind you may get hit with conversion fees, and most places here ONLY accept a credit card which has a Chip (if you don’t know what that is, you probably DO NOT have it; call your bank and ask if they offer Chip and PIN cards).

Housing

I lived in a student dorm which was not part of the school, called Estudines d’Artois. It ended up being much more expensive than what my colleagues were paying. The dorm had a private bathroom, bedroom, and small kitchen, but it was expensive. If you don’t mind the price, it was nice (although it was in a bad neighborhood), however if I were to do it again, I would go elsewhere. My rent was €590 per month, with approximately €30-40 for utilities. There is no meal plan at this location.

Transportation

Lille has a nice metro network, as well as busses (I never rode a bus, though). They also have a great network of city bikes to rent, which are fantastic. The Metro costs €.80-€1.50 per ride, depending on length. The tickets can be purchased at the metro station in a machine, however I bought a card that allowed me to recharge my ticket online (transpole.fr) as many times as I wanted to.

Health and Safety

At night I did not feel safe in the immediate area around my residence (Gambetta/Wazemmes). Myself and other people who lived there had incidences where people tried to mug us when coming home from a bar/party. However, Lille is a fairly safe city if you’re in a group. It is important to just keep an eye on your belongings and travel in a group.

Remember, the safest method of transport is not always the cheapest.

Overall exchange experience

The best thing about my semester abroad was: Being able to travel across Europe, while meeting other students from all around the world and becoming very good friends with many new, unique people that I would have never had the opportunity to meet elsewhere.

The most challenging things about my semester abroad was: Getting used to the French Administration and how stressful the administration at IESEG can be.

How did your semester abroad change your perspective? Being abroad made me really realize that the United States is great, but other nations are also great.

Tips for future students: Spend money to travel: yes, it is expensive however I would much rather spend all my money on travel instead of come home with money in my pocket.

(Note from Exchange Program: If returning home after going out at night, it is ALWAYS wise to take a taxi directly to the front door of your residence hall!)