I just completed a semester at the Université Catholique de Louvain in Louvain-La-Neuve, Belgium. I was there for 5 months from February 1 - June 31 in 2017. I am a Health Sciences student but I was in the arts and communications department at UCL to gain extra courses for credits outside of my degree. I selected this university to experience a new culture and to practice French. I was not part of the French cohort program offered at SFU and I only had a high school level understanding of French.

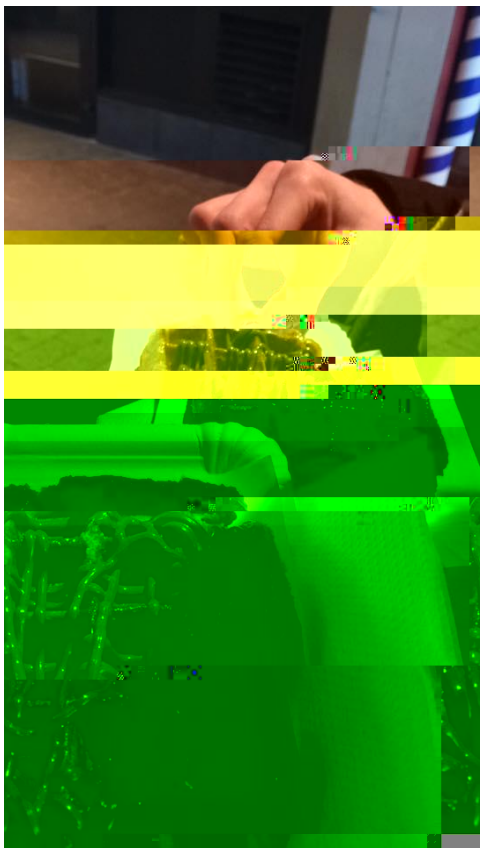
It is a French based school and I found most students outside of the international ones only spoke a little bit of English. All of my courses were in English but I also took an intro to French course. Unfortunately they only offer courses for each level (A1, A2, B1, etc.) and none in between. I already had a basic understanding but I did not pass the test to make it into the A2 class so I was placed in the beginners. It is important to research and understand what courses you want to take beforehand but the beginning two weeks of the semester are a trial period. You can attend classes and talk to the professors before you decide if you want to register for the course. There were a few differences I found in the way courses are run compared to at SFU such as that the courses rely heavily or 100% on the final exam. This means most of the Belgian students will not attend lectures. I had one course where I thought there was only 15 of us, but when I walked into the exam room it was filled with 150 students who were registered in the course. Another thing is that some courses may be longer (4 hours instead of 2) but run once every three weeks. Make sure to check on your online schedule where your course is held every week. I had a class that changed location every time.

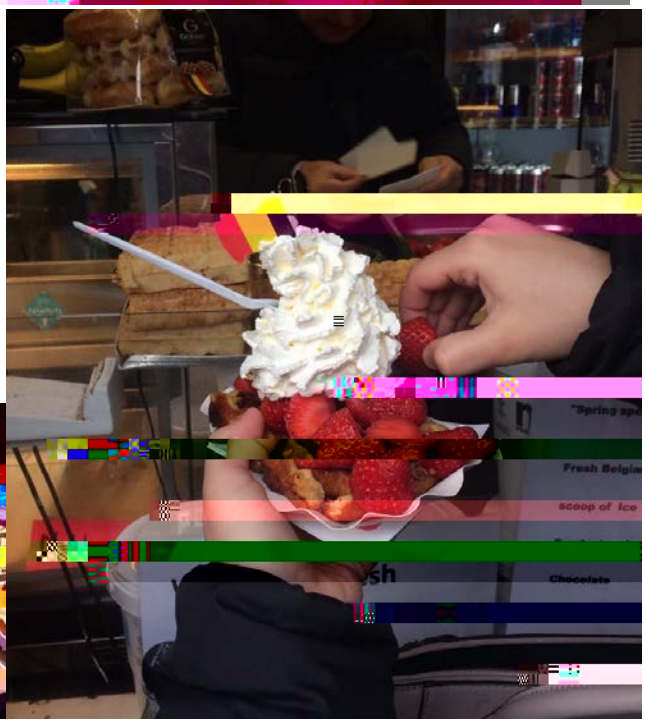
Most of my preparation went towards course selection but as I said it is more relaxed and you are able to switch things around if you are not happy with your schedule. I am a dual citizen so being a member of the European Union I did not need to apply for a visa, but from everyone I talked to said you should start the process as soon as you can if you need one.

For housing, residence is a great opportunity. They are clean, maintained, and inexpensive. Unfortunately I was too late for my application and got denied residence. So as soon as you are sent your application to UCL the first thing you need to do is complete and send in the residence form, even if you are not ready to send in the rest of your application. I found a place to live a week before my departure through Facebook groups. All of the groups are in French so make sure not to look them up in English. A typical residence dorm was 270 euros while mine was 330. I was much happier in my setting and got to live with 10 Belgian students and 1 other international. The kot (apartment) was owned by them so they were very flexible with my arrival and departure dates. The residence only allows you to move in on day one but there is a kot called kot Erasmus which specialises in helping international students. They have bunks and allow you to stay with them until your move in date. It is a great way to meet other international students and every night for the first few weeks they hold gatherings which makes it easy to meet people. All of the housing gives you your own room and sink, and then a shared bathroom, kitchen, and common area.

Here are 4 pictures of the school. The lake that is right outside the campus and lined with student housing. On nice days all the students go to the lake after class for a drink or BBQ. This is also the town centre during lunch on a nice day, and the other is walking through the shops and student housing to get to class.

Waffles of Belgium!





Pictures from Brussels, Bruges, and Ghent - other cities in Belgium.