# **Exchange Report**

for

Sciences Po Paris, Campus of Reims (France)

Major: Political science

Fall 2016 & Spring 2017

#### **PREPARATION FOR EXCHANGE**

## What I wish I'd known, and packing

When preparing for exchange, I wish that I had known that you need to start the bureaucratic processes as soon as possible. It usually takes longer than you may think.

Because you will likely have to take a train or bus from Paris to Reims, it's a good idea to pack as light as possible. Carrefour, a popular grocery store chain in France, has most of what you need to survive, but there is also an IKEA in Reims that is accessible by free shuttle (for IKEA members — you can just sign up online easily) from the main train station (Gare Centre). The bigger Carrefour grocery store, on rue Gambetta, near the Sciences Po campus, also sells dishes and kitchenware.

Travel and transportation

rent. However, because you're on an exchange, you will probably to spend more on travel and since you can't take much with you, you will probably have to buy more new things.

On that note, it is important to set up your bank account as soon as possible when you arrive. The bank I used was BNP Paribas, but other popular banks include Société Générale and La Banque Postale. Be sure to research which bank works best for you, and which account you will need. As well, look out for cancellation fees, since you'll likely be canceling your bank account within a year of setting it up. I did have some trouble setting up my bank account at BNP Paribas, because their policy states that they must mail your debit card PIN to you, so you receive your card separately from your PIN. It took about 1 and a half months for the PIN to arrive in the mail. I'm sure my situation was an outstanding circumstance, and that it does not happen to everyone, but it still shows how important it is to open a bank account right away.

#### **DURING EXCHANGE**

### Arrival and accommodations

During the orientation, students learn valuable information about bank accounts, visas, and academic expectations. It is also a great opportunity to meet people. Finding connections at school seemed to be generally easier than finding them in residence. I lived in a CROUS residence, about a 15-minute walk away from the campus, called Teilhard de Chardin. This residence has both studios (18 m<sup>2</sup>) and *chambres* (9 m<sup>2</sup>). Both have a small bathroom and mini-fridge, but only studios have a small kitchen. Students who live in the *chambres* cook in the shared kitchens on each floor. Residents can rent bedding from the administration. Otherwise, Carrefour and IKEA sell bedding and pillows.

#### Academic details

The Sciences Po Reims campus only has about 1000 students, so class sizes are generally quite small. Most of the students are French, who take courses in English. All university communications within the Reims campus are done in French and in English (so Canadians feel right at home!). The course enrolment process is sometimes frustrating. The course catalogue is often not finalized until the last minute and exchange students usually have the last timeslot to choose their courses. Students are also not able to view which courses are full before enrolment (unlike at SFU). Be sure to have a plan B and C for your course schedule.

#### Country information

The climate in Reims is almost exactly the same as Vancouver's, although it rains a bit less. Because this is northern France, it does get quite cold in the winter, starting around November. It starts to warm up around the middle of March. Springtime in Reims is beautiful, because of all of the blooming trees and flowers!

In my experience at Sciences Po, I'm not sure that I can say what French culture *is*, because the campus was extremely multicultural.



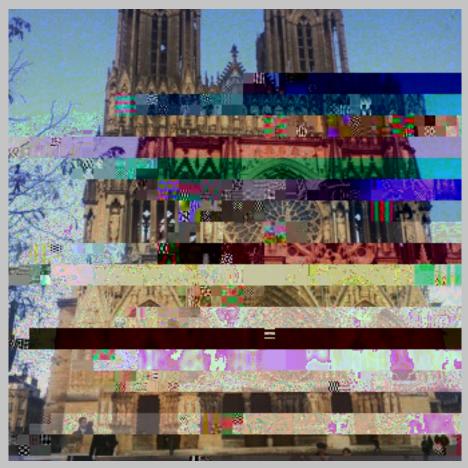
The Parc de Champagne is a great place to hang out with friends (when the weather is nice).

## Social and extra-curricular activities

There's a reason why Reims is called the "cité des sacres et du champagne": the main characteristics of Reims are the cathedrals (old coronation sites for French royalty) and the champagne houses. Students are usually offered a discount for tours at various Reims champagne houses, and I would recommend going to at least one. It's a great way to learn more history about the city.

But Reims is not all churches and champagne — there are also many beautiful parks in the city! My favourite was the Parc de Champagne, located about a 5 minute walk away from my residence. My friends and I often went to this park to have picnics, and some community events are also hosted at the park. It's a nice place to study during the warmer months.

Because there are so many universities in Reims, downtown is usually quite busy on weekend nights. The Place Drouet d'Erlon has a huge diversity of bars and restaurants — from a



Cathédrale Notre Dame in downtown Reims.

Sherlock-themed pub to a rum bar to a Turkish fast food restaurant. The Place d'Erlon is easily accessible from almost anywhere in Reims by bus or tram, but, as I mentioned before, transit services usually do not run very late at night.

## **REFLECTION AFTER EXCHANGE**

## What I've learned from the challenges I faced

The biggest lesson I learned from this experience is about confidence. I faced some challenges for the duration of my exchange regarding my confidence in my ability to speak French. Since I took almost all of my courses in French, this affected my schoolwork, especially because all classes at Sciences Po require an in-class presentation. I struggled with a sort of "imposter syndrome" during about the first half of each semester; I felt absolutely unqualified

associations and exploring Reims as much as you can are great ways to take advantage of this experience.

The second, but most important, point is to be confident in your abilities. Sciences Po is a prestigious university, which can be intimidating to exchange students, who sometimes feel like outsiders on campus. The point of the exchange year is to step outside of your academic and social comfort zone. It's a great achievement to be accepted to SFU, it's a great achievement to be accepted to the exchange program, and it's a great achievement to get to attend Sciences Po. There will be many challenges, but at the end of the day, the Reims experience will hopefully be, overall, a great one, and one that allows you to grow as a student, as a friend, and as a citizen of the world.

Félicitations et bon courage !