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# HEC PARIS EXCHANGE REPORT

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Spring 2019



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# HEC Paris Exchange Report

## Monthly Activity Log

### February:

Spring semester courses started in early February, while orientation activities took place one week before semester started. Despite the hassles of settling down, I wandered the different Paris arrondissements– strolled the Latin quarters, glimpsed the Orsay museum, shopped the traditional farmer’s market, and observed the lively scene of the city. Living in Paris meant stepping out of the comfort zone, trying out new things, and broadening horizons. Attending the salsa class, trying out gastronomic highlights, learning the language, and understanding the culture can be challenging and exciting, and extremely rewarding if with adequate preparation.

I recommend taking the French course in HEC, helping with integration of basics of French culture and society. With HEC’s student card, cultural monuments, museums, and tourist sites can be accessed for free, and I enjoyed a few museum visits in the Orangerie, the Orsay, the Pantheon, and the Paris mosque. For travels, I visited Brittany and Normandy, summed up in the travelogue links below.

- **Brittany trip:** <https://medium.com/2019-paris-exchange-semester/brittany-bayeux-etretat-travelogue-part-1-2ca4bb45df4a>
- **Normandy trip :** <https://medium.com/2019-paris-exchange-semester/brittany-mt-st-michel-and-loire-valleys-travelogue-cc9dd5aec8b7>



### March

First half of the semester passed in a whirlwind. 2 of the classes in HEC made an impression: Derivatives trading and Inside Venture Capital. Teaching and assessment methods, classroom diversity, and course organization being incredibly different from that of Hong Kong, these first semester courses gave me a partial glimpse of how one of the best Grand Ecoles in France operate- I appreciated some aspects yet found it unstructured in other aspects. This is shared in one of my course reflection articles below.

After many visits to Paris, I realized how understanding historical developments and appreciating the fine arts intensifies impressions of the sites visited. “The experience of a city is refracted by cultural expectations”, as Parisian buildings (The Pantheon, the Notre Dame, the Louvre, Palais Bourbon, the Sacre-Coeur, the Conceirgie, The Sorbonne...), Parisian streets, Haussmannized residences, royal Jardins, and numerous historical sites ubiquitous in the cityscape reminds us of the collective memory of history. Paris itself is one gigantic site of memory, and as De Amicis noted in 1878, that “one never sees Paris for the first time; one always sees it again.” A fusion of modern elements and fine preservation of historical monuments manifests Paris’s timeless charm: as your thirst for knowledge on historical recollections of arts, history, and philosophy can always be found in one of the museums, art galleries, quaint bookstores, or simply from people watching in open gardens as you reflect and recollect.

In March, we had our week long break, and I traveled to Amsterdam, with travelogues on the links below. Of exchange travels, one of the joys is to meet up with friends also on exchange and experiencing the dynamism of the world. For instance, I met up with \*\*\*\* in one of Amsterdam’s restaurants, and I realized that having a “local” introducing you to their experiences in the city accelerates your understanding of the city. We talked about our experiences during exchange, reflections on past years of endeavors back in Hong Kong, and connections in Taiwan. Conversations taken place in different settings can differ drastically with topic and ambience. Back in Taichung, the



conversations were laid back while in Hong Kong more rushed and topics limited. We reflected a lot on these cross-cultural experiences, and I appreciate sharing and learning from the experiences we both accumulated in the past three years of overseas endeavors.

- **Amsterdam trip:** <https://medium.com/2019-paris-exchange-semester/amsterdam-travelogue-5076c2b5e4e2>



## April

In April, the second bi-semester of HEC began, as we revolved on a set of courses to the next. One of the courses that I appreciate the most is France society. “The best way to learn about a society is through appreciating the language, literature, arts, music, and architecture.” I’m really grateful for the introduction to French culture through retracing narratives in history.

Back in high school, history class was regarded as a tedious memorization process retracing political events back in time. The hundred years war, the revolutions, and the demographic divide felt worlds away from me – it literally was. Yet, the French culture course in HEC manifested the vibrancy and instantaneous connections of history and culture with our everyday lives. While introducing the Romanesque period, I thought about the sites I visited: the Arles Arena, the Cluny Roman baths, the Arenes de Lutece in Paris, and the heavy arches that can be traced in many cathedrals today. When we went onto the Gothic and Renaissance period, the Medieval Loire chateaus, the various Notre Dame cathedrals, and the artistic influences were brought into view. In addition to arts and architecture, various individuals highlighted moments in time with their life stories. “History lies between the interaction of individuals and time”, and as individuals fade away with time, their stories are timeless with inspirations and enchantment.

In April, I visited South of France cities including Avignon, Arles (with their annual bull fight Feria), Marseille, and a few mountain gems. They are summed up in the travelogue with links below.

- **South of France Trip:** <https://medium.com/2019-paris-exchange-semester/2019-provence-trip-arles-ferias-nimes-pont-du-gard-e05421bf20a1>
- **Lyon Trip** <https://medium.com/2019-paris-exchange-semester/2-days-in-lyon-4aa83a4868e5>
- **Marseille Calanques national park** <https://medium.com/2019-paris-exchange-semester/marseille-calanques-national-park-7526d61df234>





## May

May is when the examinations and project presentations take place. Courses with bi-semester credit loads mostly have examinations in the last class, while some of the examinations take place after the semester has ended. (generally in the end of May). With a few weeks before my departure in June, I traveled to Turkey and other parts of France. This is summarized in the travelogues below. (Turkey trip to be updated in blog).

- **Bordeaux Trip Travelogue** :<https://medium.com/2019-paris-exchange-semester/3-days-in-bordeaux-a3a6c6b8b708>
- **Saint Emilion Trip**: <https://medium.com/2019-paris-exchange-semester/day-trip-to-saint-emilion-a0b1cf17b0b5>
- **Istanbul Trip**: <https://medium.com/2019-paris-exchange-semester/istanbul-2019-trip-reflections-258fe904b837>



## June

France is the perfect place for a detox. During this exchange semester, the slowed pace, the cultural pursuits, and the flexible schedule provided an excellent space for inner search and self-reflection. A few months away from the speed, stress, and social validation provided a getaway to clarify personal values and the relationship with myself. I pondered on the factors of a satisfactory living environment, explored the constituents of life quality”, learned about everyday decision making, discovered my preferred pace in travel, and opened up about predicaments and learned that sharing and listening to mutual experiences are essential in the human experience.

What did a 5 month stay in France teach that other cities in Asia could not? Throughout my travels, the interaction with people, the observation of cultural dynamism, the conversations with myself revealed abundant epiphanies. I was amazed by how environments transform perspectives: on life values, on previous “dead-ends” in thought, and inspirations crafted. Of all the thoughts that flew by, people relationships, travel pace, cultural sensitivity, and materialism were aspects that I had changes in thought about.

## General Exchange Information

- 1) **Visa Procedures:** 2 appointments are required for visa application, including an interview Visa section of Consulat général de France à Hong Kong et Macao, and another at Campus France with all necessary documents. Processing time is required, so my advice is to make appointments as soon as you obtain relevant documents. Documents needed are listed on websites of above organizations.



**2) Orientation Activities:** Before the starting of semester, a week of orientation activities are held by the IS team. Activities include cheese tasting, drinking events, and introduction to the HEC campus. In addition, information session held by administration are obligatory, composed of document submission and introduction to student campus life.

**3) International Services & Activities:** During orientation week, activities organized by the IS (International student association) and HEC introduces us to many other exchange students. The exchange students' office (Mr. Douget) is extremely helpful in answering queries and organizing alterations in course scheduling.

#### **4) Accommodation**

**A. On campus housing:** Student housing selections are varied (shared flats, individual rooms), yet spaces are limited in my exchange semester. Prices, accommodation facilities, and application dates will be sent through HEC's email.

**B. Off campus housing: ECLA student campus**

ECLA is located in Massy Palaiseau, offering easy transportation to Paris with 2 RER train lines. In addition, furniture, services, and staff were in fine condition, with essentials provided in the flat (including bedsheets, towels, cooking wares etc).

- ECLA website: <https://www.ecla-campus.com/fr/>

**C. Other off campus choices in Paris**

Other types of accommodations can be found on "Studapart", and homestay options are also available.

#### **5) Courses Registration**

The 4-month semester is split in 2 bi-semesters, while course registration are sent by email by HEC's administration team. The course timetable, catalogue, and syllabus are released online before the start of semester, and prioritization of courses are required from the student. 24 ECTs are required for exchange students, while each course is generally 3 or 6 ECTs.

#### **6) Teaching & Assessment Methods**

I mostly took Finance courses in HEC, which offers wide varieties of courses ranging from Finance, marketing, management, and business electives. "Exchange is a time when you could dedicate time to subjects of your interest and loosen efforts for certain classes." I really enjoyed 3 of the Finance modules courses taken in HEC: Derivatives trading, Credit Rating, and Venture Capital, in that order. With professors from industry backgrounds, the courses were highly integrated with industry practices. Hands-on field experience, broad industry perspective, up to date connections with work practices were aspects that I enjoyed the most in these classes. I was really inspired by their passion and dedication for their fields and also by how knowledgeable and humble they were when sharing their personal experiences.

#### **Recommended Courses:**

**A. Derivatives trading:** Highly recommended, if you have an interest in global markets or want a general knowledge of trading. From simple introduction to derivative products, market participants, the Greeks, to first order hedging, teaching pace accelerated and the learning curve was extremely sharp. The Professor made everything crystal clear, from a bank's hedging portfolio, market opportunities, to Greek hedging strategies.

**B. Credit Rating:** Credit rating is a specialized field, yet in depths understanding of industry players, rating methodology, and contemporary developments are taught in this course. The course was extremely well structured, starting off with introductions of the field, today's needs (Sovereign, Government, Corporate debt) and practices, and ended with the evolvement of Basel regulations today.

**C. Inside Venture Capital:** The VC course in HEC is divided into 2 sessions each week, the first half on professor lectures and second half when industry professionals are invited to

share their experience and company expertise. We learn about concepts on board and paper, and the immediate application to industry was a course highlight.

**D. French Culture or French Society:** From the Romanesque period, the medieval ages, the Renaissance, the 2 world wars, to contemporary French society, the course centered on history, arts, architecture, literature, and individuals (artists, politicians, writers etc.) back in time. Each seminar was a crash course on highly condensed historical recollections, yet highly integrated with what we see in France today.

**E. Corporate Finance** (I have not taken the course, yet good reviews from fellow exchange friends)

- 7) **Sports & Recreation Facilities:** Living off campus in ECLA, I wasn't in contact with much of school's facilities. Facilities can be seen on HEC's website, and sports groups hold weekly trainings on campus.
- 8) **Finance & Banking (including currency / expenses):** Temporary booths from French banks (BNP, Soc Gen, LCL) welcome exchange students for account opening in the start of the semester. My advice is to bring adequate cash and a credit card for essentials in the first few weeks, as the account opening takes a few weeks.
- 9) **Food:** HEC has a cafeteria (hot meals) and a café (sandwiches, coffee, fruit), offering adequate food selections in my point of view. With off campus accommodation in Massy Palaiseau, I enjoyed the convenience of nearby supermarkets (Carrefour, Auchan) and boulangeries that accommodated to needs of self cooking.
- 10) **Transportation:** Forms of transportation in Paris include the Metro (zone 1), the RER trains (linking the inner zones to more suburban areas like HEC Paris, situated in zone 4), busses, and high speed trains (TGV). A Navigo card (weekly or monthly) or single tickets can be purchased according to your needs of travel. HEC Paris provides SAVAC shuttle busses to travel between Paris and a few specific stops, and downloading the app "KAROS" enables online purchase of shuttle rides.
- 11) **Climate:** For the spring semester, the initial 2 months had weather around -3 to 5 degrees Celsius, while it peaked 10 degrees in the months following April. A warm winter coat is advised for the starting of the semester.
- 12) **Mobile plans:** Various mobile plans are provided by different operators, such as Free mobile. (<http://mobile.free.fr/>)
- 13) **Cautionary measures:** Like any other big city around the world, Paris is a vibrant and versatile city: with a huge cultural diversity and influx of people from various backgrounds. Remain composed, alert, and mindful of personal items, and I suggest keeping them within view at all times. It is said that pickpockets peak in prime tourism months, thus take care of your belongings (bags, pockets, suitcases) while traveling.

#### Items to Bring

Essentials	Adaptors, cabin luggage (for traveling), medicine, clothes, stationary
Documents	Passport, Pre-arrival documents, Passport-sized photos
Finance	Cash, credit card

#### Useful Links and contacts

- French consulate: <https://hongkong.consulfrance.org>
- Campus France: <http://campusfrance.org>
- HEC Paris: <http://www.hec.edu/>
- Free Mobile: <http://mobile.free.fr/>
- ECLA Campus Website: <https://www.ecla-campus.com/fr/>

#### Personal Blog (on exchange travels)

- <https://medium.com/2019-paris-exchange-semester>

Inquiries on France exchange welcome – (My contacts from SBM by emailing [bmugexch@ust.hk](mailto:bmugexch@ust.hk).)  
Enjoy your exchange experience.