The University:

In 2018, during the autumn semester I have done a graduate erasmus exchange at the Sciences Po University in Paris. SciencesPo or the Paris Institute of Political Studies is a prestigious university and one of the best in the field of social sciences. The university has a very good reputation thanks to which political guests and conferences are rather frequent on campus. Also thanks to this the university has widespread international connections all over the globe.

I did my exchange in the master programme *Governing the Large Metropolis*, which had a very rich syllabus consisting of various subjects like: public policy, urban history, sociology and a mixture of other social sciences. All my courses have enriched me a lot academically and this university has given me the possibility to study at an unprecedented high level of scientific environment. However also this semester was one of the toughest I had in my higher studies.

When applying to this university for an erasmus exchange there are a few additional bureaucratic steps to take. Around April I had to go through an application procedure on the university's own system and website, and only got my confirmation of acceptance around the beginning of May. For those who apply they should pay attention that during these procedures, concerning graduate exchange one has to choose a masters programme which they have to follow, and also each masters programme has specific language requirements. Undergraduate or bachelor exchange is rather different. At Sciences Po there are specialisations or different programmes for undergraduate students. Also Sciences Po has multiple campuses all over France, like Le Havre, Poitiers and so on. However those campuses are only for bachelor students, masters programmes are only taught at the original Paris campus. This is also the reason for the rules on language prerequisites since during bachelor studies there is no needed level of french or english because the bachelor students are more mobile between the multiple campuses, however the number of courses taught in english are given in the Paris campus. I took an english programme and I did not need french at all however it is very useful to take it as a foreign language course since in Paris and with it is proves to be very essential and useful.

I had a few conflicts and difficulties with understanding the inner system and bureaucracy of SciencesPo, so if anyone is interested in an exchange at this university, I advise them to write
an email to an academic advisor first. Especially in matters concerning the courses in a chosen masters programme.

Course registration can also be rather complicated since each programme and each level of exchange (graduate or bachelor) has their own course registration on a different day at different hours. So it is strongly advised to check the course list before the date, and one must consult with the academic advisor before hand.

The academic advisor is in close relationship with the chosen faculty and masters programme, however concerning specific erasmus documentation (Validation Forms) one should turn to the Centre europe DAIE. Once accepted and admitted to Sciences Po one will get a Sciences Po email address which will automatically have these email addresses and contacts registered.

*Links:*

https://www.sciencespo.fr/international/en/content/masters-exchange-programme

https://www.sciencespo.fr/international/en/content/masters-exchange-programme

*Paris:*

I believe that there is no need to explain why Paris could be a chosen destination for an erasmus exchange. It is a metropolis always vibrating with life, where there is a large diversity and rich culture, a lot of historical monuments, and the city also has an undeniable magic surrounding it which is already well represented in poems and books. In Paris along the tremendous amount of tourist attractions, there are numerous museums and most of those are free under the age of 25. Because Paris is so big and there is always something going on in the city. So even after four months of my stay there I still feel like I have seen nothing of the true Paris.

Even if Paris seems small on a map, it is tricky because the agglomeration surrounding is a vital part of the center thanks to the far reaching transportation system. In Paris public transportation is essential, so even if it is rather pricey it is definitely worth it to buy a ticket for it. A monthly student ticket costs 75 euro for all 5 areas, which is considerably expensive. This is a Navigo Pass, a magnetic card which can be uploaded with new monthly pass by machines or by RATP offices. There are also daily and weekly pass choices which can be put on that card, and also the price of the ticket or pass can differ if we change the amount of
zones it should cover. For those who plan on staying a whole academic year they can take the ImagineR, which is good for a whole year and all public transportation networks in the Ile-de-France region, and it costs 342 euro for the whole year.

As from the ticket price we can see that Paris is not cheap, especially since the university in in the very heart of the city where everything is the most expensive. For students Crous restaurants are available where one can get a full course meal for 4-5 euros which is the best price one can get around here. Also in Paris there is a very strong international student community which ensures that there are a lot of free parties and events which makes your erasmus more lively on a budget.

Links:
https://www.imagine-r.com/
http://www.crous-paris.fr/restauration/les-lieux-de-restauration/
http://www.erasmusofparis.fr/

Accomodation:
Getting an accommodation or a flat in Paris is a real nightmare. It’s not only difficult for foreigners, but even for french people it is a struggle on all fronts. To rent a flat the french housing system has its own language, documentation and its own rules. On the SciencesPo website there are a lot of information in detail concerning this issue which I strongly advise people to check thoroughly. It is said that if you want to find an accomodation in Paris you will definitely have to make a compromise in the end, either with the price, either with location or with the size of the room.

Also to be able to rent rent a flat, a room or a studio, it is often needed to have a “garant” who has legal income inside France and has three times the amount of income than your rent, which with studios worth with 800 euro per month rents is rather difficult to find. Also with the hordes of international students incoming each semester the competition is very tight.

An alternative could be student housing, or the so called “foyers”. However if only one does a semester exchange there could be difficulties since such institutions prefer to take in students
for the whole academic year. The best dreamlike option is Cité Universitaire, which is a huge campus of student housing with a crous restaurant, multiple libraries, soccer fields, swimming pools and gyms. However mostly they take in people for the whole year as well, scholarships students or the ones in need, so getting in is very though especially since there is a huge waiting list. But it is still good to try even with not too much chance of getting in.

Since the aforementioned options did not work out for me I have chosen colocation or flat sharing on multiple websites since you do not need to go all the strict documentation which is needed for a dossier, and you are much more mobile. However in Paris there are a lot of fake and cheating accounts so the user must always stay vigilant and has to look out for trickery, and scams. An option lot of people take is that they get an accomodation via Airbnb before their exchange starts and for two weeks at least they go and check the colocation offers to make sure they are not tricked and the deal is real. Or even I have heard that someone got an accommodation for the whole semester via Airbnb. On average rent prices are very high, 800 and 900 euros are the average in center Paris, while the total erasmus scholarship monthly is around 470-500 euro per month. One has to prepare to have a proper financial backing and funds to do an erasmus in Paris. Of course student jobs during summer can help with this.

Also the french state helps a lot as well, since via CAF (*Caisse d’Allocation Familiales*) every student is eligible to get financial help. For this, one needs to have a french bank account which is easy to open since during the first two weeks of university all of the banks have agents there stationed at the university with offers specially for Sciences Po students. This makes opening a french bank account convenient and easy. CAF is really helpful, it can cover 170-200 euros of financial aid per month so I strongly recommend on applying for this financial aid. However it is confusing as any other french bureaucratic system, but even in Sciences Po on the housing email address they offer to help with application to CAF and question concerning on housing even with Cité Universitaire they could help getting a room so the most useful is to send an email to the following email address:

*info.logement@sciencespo.fr*

*or*

*services.etudiants@sciencespo.fr*
In conclusion I can only recommend this exchange to anyone who wants to experience going
to a prestigious university and gather knowledge unlike anywhere else. Even though there
might be hardships concerning the accommodation, or with the living expenses, living in Paris
promises a lifetime experience and lot of adventure.

I wish all the best and a lot of luck to anyone choosing this destination, and I hope they will
enjoy it as much as I did.