I have spent the first semester of the term 2018/19 in Paris, at Sciences Po. Sciences Po is one of the most prestigious universities in France, and it has one of the best International Relations programmes in Europe.

The university itself has several buildings, all of them situated very close to each other in the Quartier Latin of Paris. It has two libraries, both of them well equipped with Mac computers, which any student can use and printers, with which any student can print for free up to 600 pages during the semester. The Sciences Po Bookshop is also a place worth checking out, other than nice textbooks, it has some cool “pocket” edition books, which sum up important political concepts, or summarize the history of different countries in a very “digestable” size.

When you go to Sciences Po, be ready, that at every time you enter any of the buildings, you will have to show your student card, for security reasons. The Parisians have many such security measures these days everywhere in the city but it’s not bothering at all.

The main hall of the main building, which is 27 Rue Saint Guillaume, has all the student associations. There are a lot of student organisations at Sciences Po, there are tons created each year. Some are less political and rather cultural, such as the Argentinian association about mate tea, whose members come together to drink the aforementioned drink regularly, however there are some more serious ones and they come from both ends of the political scale, meaning that you will sometimes find the communists sitting in the hall besides the Young Nationalists, and so on.

You will get to know the main ones during the orientation day (during my stay, it was held on the 28th of August). There’s the main one, like our HÖK in Hungary, they deal with students’ issues, organising parties, etc. Then there’s one for the Arts, one for the Environment, one for Sports and one for cultural exchange and international students. And after these, there are the several small ones. You can join any of these, although when I have joined the Solidaires Étudiantes, they have mainly spoken French but you can signal to them the language barrier and they will definitely try their best to speak more English or try to include you more.

Before your arrival, Sciences Po will send you an email about a possibility called Welcome Week. This costs 250 euros which I have found to be exclusionary and completely unreasonably priced therefore I didn’t attend. My friends have told me that it was nice, and there were some people who have kept their acquaintances from the programme, so if you are up to some wine and cheese tasting for the price of the Hungarian minimum wage, this is your chance!

This is going to be a very general lesson to be learnt from the overall Parisian Erasmus experience. As an average Hungarian or Eastern European, you might have some financial
problems. The exchange students at Sciences Po are mostly from Western countries and have very different ways of looking at money than we do, however, Paris is expensive even for them. But, they won’t cross their eyes at the sight of the 5 euro beer or feel weird when they have to pay more than 10 euros for a party. My advice is, that if you have the possibility, try convincing the others, that you go to one of the beautiful parks in Paris (Jardins de Luxembourg is very close to the university, and Buttes-Chaumont is the prettiest one) and bring your own beers and baguette from the shop, at least as long as the weather is nice.

For going out, at first I would recommend the so-called Afterworks. I have never heard this expression before going to Paris, but I learnt to understand that afterwork means a gathering after_work, usually around 6 or 7, outside, close to the Seine for example, in a bar or in a park. Sitting down, chatting, and usually not until late at night, only a couple of hours. You will see many such Facebook events, and posters at the university as well, since many of them are organised by student organisations.

The Erasmus parties are not the best deal. It is worth it go to them in the beginning, since the people there are usually just as lost and lonely as you are, so it’s very easy to make friends but the music is what I would categorize as really bad and others might call French pop or hip-hop. When you got to know some people, you can leave the Erasmus parties behind and start exploring the Parisian nightlife together, which is the most amazing music scene that you can get.

They say that students have no time to party when they go to Sciences Po. That is not true. However, especially compared to Corvinus, you will have a lot to do. At ScPo, you can only miss 2 seminars without an official medical paper. If you miss three and you don’t have the proof of being sick you fail. If you plagiarize, you get kicked out. Other than that, you will have something to do for all of your classes: something to read, a little summary, presentation, something to do concerning the next topic. You will have groupwork, essays, midterms and exams. I have started my semester by creating a nice journal, where I marked every assignment I would have during my time there and then used this diary throughout my stay. It’s not too much, but you have to be focussed and hard-working, especially if you want a good grade. They have a grading scale from 0-20, where under 10 you fail but nobody gets better than 18.

The teachers are all very nice and helpful. Feel free to contact them whenever and about whatever, and be sure that they will respond quickly and help you according to their best.

The trickiest thing about an Erasmus in Paris is the accommodation. Start early! I almost gave up hope, when through a Facebook post I managed to find a friend-of a friend-of a friend who had a flat outside of Paris with a tiny empty room - for 400 euros... If you are
Hungarian, definitely try the “Párizsi Magyarok” facebook group, people are usually very friendly there and keen to help their fellow Hungarians. There are several groups called Collocation in Paris, Sciences Po accommodation etc. try those as well. If you can, message people in French, even if you don’t speak it very well! It is more likely that you’ll get an answer that way. On the website of Sciences Po, there are also accommodation listed, verified by the university. As far as I know, Cité Universitaire, a sort of dormitory is not available for Bachelor students but you can still try to apply. Make sure that any place you choose, you get a proper contract! That way, you will be eligible for CAF - a housing aid provided by the French state for anyone living there, which can be up to 200 euros a month. Transportation is pricey as well, the monthly pass costs 70 euros. (It’s called Navigo.) You will need a small profile picture to create this, it’s easier to bring it from home than to make the photo there (photomats are everywhere in the city, but it costs 5 euros.) The student pass is 50% off but you can only buy it for the whole year - therefore it’s not worth if you only stay for a semester. If you don’t live as far as I did, you can rent a bike (vélib - bike rental system), which is very cheap.

You can change classes in the first two weeks. The administration might be really slow to reply to emails (understandable, they are very overwhelmed) but feel free to go to their offices and bother them in person. They will most probably to their best to solve your issues. For the signatures for official papers, Hungarians have to go to Centre Europe, in one of the buildings. Many things can be dealt with via email as well.

For EU citizens: if you get sick, you can either go to the Sciences Po doctor, but that might be crowded in the flu season. If she’s full, go to any of the medical centers. You will have to pay a certain amount of money that will be reimbursed in your home country if you show the official papers of the visit.

All in all, my advice is to stay very open to everybody, feel free to just walk up to anyone in your class, to make friends or just to ask for help. Same goes for the teachers, they are very open to discuss any issues. Feel free to contact me as well, if you have any questions regarding your stay in Paris.

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