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Informational Report on the BC-ENS Exchange Program

Orientation:

I was a *pensionnaire étranger* at the ENS for the school year of 2021-2022. I arrived in Paris in the second week of September 2022. My first destination in Paris was the ENS and I went directly to the Housing Office located in the central campus at Ulm. There I was given the keys to my dorm and the person in charge walked me over across the street to where the exchange students are normally housed. Another thing that I did my first day was to go to the office where I could pick up my student ID which is necessary to enter the dorms and the main building.

In the middle of September, orientation is organized through a series of meetings and events lasting an entire week. You will receive information about all of the different meetings at the end of August by email. The first meeting was an orientation specifically for *pensionnaires étrangers*. I was with a group of three other exchange students and we were given a ton of helpful information about where to go for what and when. There is also a general foreign student information session. As well as more informal social events, such as a coffee get together in the courtyard, the *courô*, or a boat ride around the Seine.

Courses:

In early September, before regular classes begin, the ENS offers short intensive courses in French for international students. These courses last around two weeks and they can be extremely helpful to brush up on your language skills and also to give you a good assessment of where they are at. These classes are offered for all levels, from beginners to advanced. After the intensive course is finished, you have the option to sign up for further French language courses (at whatever level you are) for the duration of the regular semester. Another reason why these courses are useful is because you will have the chance to begin to get to know other students. PhD students with the *pensionnaire étranger* status; Erasmus students from other universities in Europe (mostly master's students); and finally incoming international *normaliens* (undergrads). The intensive French language course takes place every weekday for two weeks and includes outings such as, for example, visiting the Bastille.

Regular classes begin at the end of September. Course listings are not super easy to find online. Shortly before the beginning of the semester, the school made available a physical booklet with all of the course listings for the semester. This booklet was distributed in different ways but one sure way to get one's hands on one of them is to go to the International Relations Office in the main campus. Whether you are officially enrolled in classes or not, in my experience professors have a permissive attitude to letting people sit in on classes pretty much across the board.

It goes without saying that most of the classes are held in French. However, I was interested in English-language classes as well and in fact there were several options in my field

(philosophy). Increasingly, universities in Europe generally and the ENS are offering courses taught in English. If I recall correctly there were at least three different advanced level courses in English in philosophy for each semester.

The ENS is a *grande école* university which is actually a part of the PSL, *Paris Sciences et Lettres*. The PSL is a group of universities in Paris. By being a student at the ENS, you are also able to enroll in classes in the other schools of PSL. I personally also audited a course organized by the Paris Program in Critical Theory from Northwestern University by arranging it personally with the organizer of the Program in Paris.

Library:

The only library our student IDs will automatically give us access to is the library at the ENS. The library is divided into two wings which are found right across from each other. One for the humanities and another for the exact sciences. In order to get access, you will have to submit an application online. Information with regards to this will be sent to you by email. If you miss it, you can go to the main desk of the library and ask them for the link to the application. Once the application is sent, they will tell you that it can take up to two weeks before you gain access. After submitting the application, I explained to the librarians that I had an urgent need for access and they processed it for me right then and there.

The library has an excellent selection for French language books. Should you need them, their selection of English-language books is average. On the other hand, the Sorbonne library has a much wider selection of English-language books and ENS students have the option of signing up for a membership there at a low cost (it is also conveniently walking distance from the ENS Ulm).

Room:

You are assigned a dorm before you arrive and communication about this procedure is initiated by the school and done by email over the Summer before the beginning of the school year. Many of the normaliens are housed in the same central building of the ENS where dormitories are in the same building as the classrooms. However, as a *pensionnaire étranger* and as an exchange student more broadly, you are housed in the building across the street from the main campus. Occasionally, exchange students will also be housed in the *Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris* which is two metro stops away from Luxembourg (one of the two stops closest to the ENS Ulm).

The facilities in the dorms are very modest. The rooms are individual. They are around 12 square meters. Inside the room, there is a sink with a mirror, a bed, a closet, a desk, and a chair. Communal bathrooms are found on each floor and each floor also counts with a kitchen. Though very simple, the dorms and shared kitchens can be a very good opportunity to meet the other exchange students since they will mostly be housed together. There is no wifi in the rooms. The laundry room is located in the basement of the central campus.

I had access to the room from the beginning of September until the middle of July.

Meals and Healthcare:

The central campus at ENS Ulm has a dining hall which only serves lunch, from Monday to Friday. To pay, you use your student card on which you can load money using specific stations found inside the dining hall. There are three stations, one of which serves only vegetarian meals. The price of a regular meal composed of main, salad, and dessert is 3.50 Euros. When the weather is nice, you can get your lunch and take it over to the *courô*. A simple breakfast is offered at the café next to the dining hall. There is a street called *Rue Mouffetard* which is a five to ten minute walk from the ENS which is lined with bars and restaurants. It is very popular with students and young people, especially at night. On Sundays, during the day, it is very busy with families.

By virtue of being a student at a French university, you have a right to join the national healthcare system. The procedure is relatively simple. You sign up online and you eventually get your national insurance ID. In Paris, most people schedule doctor's visits on an app called *Doctolib*. It is extremely easy to use and allows you access to all kinds of specialists and tests and it will allow you to find a provider near you or by video. Most doctors and hospitals will accept the national insurance even if they require a small co-pay.