
Travel Report

ENSIMAG

Grenoble Institute of Technology

Spencer Raisanen
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Computational Engineering & Technical Physics

1 Introduction

This report covers some aspects of the author's experiences during his exchange semester spent at Grenoble Institute of Technology.

2 Orientation Days

The Orientation Week was when the French approach to organization really became known. Despite having different starting dates, which were not given in advance, all of the programs had the same Orientation Week. As my program had a late starting date, there were three weeks in between the orientation week and the start of classes. The Orientation Week presented the campus and the city to the new incoming students and was overall a nice time where other incoming students were met. Throughout the next few weeks there were a few days during which the incoming students had to go to the university in order to fill out some forms and so on. Overall the orientation seemed quite unorganized as the university orientation and the particular program orientation had sometimes clashing times.

3 Language Courses

There were a few different language courses which were possible for the incoming exchange students. The first one occurred during the Orientation Week and was quite useful for me as I had never studied French beforehand. During the semester there was another course offered based upon your French level. This course was unfortunately a bit too slow moving for my taste and did not help very much in improving my French level. I also participated in a language exchange program, which was slightly more helpful in broadening my French knowledge as I could move forward at my own pace.

4 Academic Calendar

When applying for exchange I was given a notification of the Orientation Week beginning the 28th of August and lasting throughout the week. A particular starting time for classes was not given beforehand. There was a week of Refresher Courses taking place before the official courses began which were somewhat useful in presenting what background information the professors expected the students to have. The official courses then began the week of the 30th of September. There was normally school every day during the week, and if there was some disturbance for a day the class would be shuffled into another day during the semester. Three weeks of holiday were given throughout the semester with a week during November and two weeks during the Christmas and New Year holidays. The semester ended with two weeks of exams with a finishing date of February 4, 2018.

5 Courses & Exams

The first thing to mention is that the French system is very non-transparent and they will take from 6 to 8 weeks to return the scores to you. One thing which can be said about the French system is that it is very theoretically heavy and focused on providing really hard tests upon the students, even if the tests don't have much to do with the stated aims of the course. The courses I took were focused upon Machine Learning and Applied Statistics. They cover a lot of material in the courses generally and the credits given seem to be a bit small for the amount of work required. The exams were also very difficult with a 50% average required across all courses in order to pass. This meant that it was expected that some courses could very likely receive marks below 50% and need a slight boost from other courses which were somewhat easier for the student.

According to my experience, the exams didn't necessarily match very well with what was covered in the course, and some courses had extra materials which were only given in French and which the exams ended up being heavily based upon.

It can definitely be said that the courses of ENSIMAG heavily support the learning of the students, but that the exams could be organized in a slightly more productive manner. Thankfully, I did not run into any situations wherein the professors were teaching in French as it did happen to other international friends who were in different programs.

If I would re-apply to ENSIMAG I would definitely consider doing as many project based courses as possible since the professors were in general very supportive with the projects and during the course of the projects I completed I learned a lot of very practical things. Another recommendation I would give is to ask the French students what courses they would recommend. If they mention that a course is not supposed to be very good, then do not take it. I did not follow the advice of a French student and the course ended up being taught in a very poor manner and was very difficult with an exam which was based upon one lecture for which no worked out examples were given.

6 Practical Things to Consider

First thing to consider is to realize that if you are a bigger-than-average person then it may be hard to find proper fitting shoes and clothing since the French are generally quite small when compared to other countries. I had to go to many (5+) different stores to find shoes (46 wide) and pants (loose fit) which fit correctly.

Another thing to consider is what conditions you wish to live in. I lived in a student residence due to the price level, but it needs to be said that it was far from comfortable, with shared kitchens, bathrooms, and showers. I would recommend attempting to find a place from the private market or trying to get lucky in the student residence assignment.

Third, the prices in Grenoble are not much different than the prices in Lappeenranta. Keep this in mind when looking to head there. I actually had higher expenses living in Grenoble than in Lappeenranta. Transportation can be had via a bike or via buying a monthly tram pass which is quite cheap if you are under 25 years of age. The city is relatively easy to bike as it is relatively flat throughout.

Last of all, remember that towards the exam period there will not be much free time so I recommend doing your best to move around and explore the area well before the exam period arrives and possibly stay a bit longer in the area after the exams are finished.