

Debriefing Report

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I. Academic Program:

An academic exchange to Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) in Lausanne, Switzerland was undertaken during the winter semester from October to February as a substitute for the 3B term of the Electrical Engineering Program at University of Waterloo. The courses taken at EPFL were the equivalent courses to the four technical core courses in 3B. They are E&CE 318 (Transmission II), E&CE 332 (Circuits et systèmes électroniques I), E&CE 362 (Electromécanique I), and E&CE 380 (Automatique I). Two extra courses, which were transferred as fourth year technical electives, were also taken. They were Génie médical (SY DE 444) and Propagation des ondes acoustiques, which does not have an equivalent at UW. The courses covered material from the same general area as those at UW but there were many differences in curriculum, which is to be expected with a course taken on exchange. There were some hassles registering for courses and exams in EPFL's electronic system, but the people at the Service académique were generally quite helpful with any problems that arose. Instruction methods varied with each course. Some instructors preferred using blackboards, whereas others favoured hand-written or electronic slides. Evaluation is much different from UW. For most courses, the final exams constitute the entire mark and there is much less laboratory work.

II. Residences:

Fortunately, the arrangements worked out as expected. The first choice of the six residences, Triaudes, was granted, which consisted of a large bedroom in a four-person apartment. The residences, especially Triaudes and Cèdres, are very spacious and of high quality. Although the cost of living is higher in Switzerland than in Canada, the cost of rent for the student residences is comparable and in some cases lower than that in Waterloo. However, Fondation Maisons pour Etudiants et Etudiantes de l'UNIL et EPFL (FMEL), which organizes housing for the seven residences situated throughout Lausanne, does not guarantee residence to exchange students. To optimize the chance of securing housing in any of the residences, it is best to apply very early, even before the application to EPFL has been sent, and to

telephone the FMEL office repeatedly until acceptance is granted. Finding housing can otherwise be very difficult. Lausanne has a very low vacancy rate and without a Swiss guarantor, being chosen to sign a lease is extremely challenging.

III. Costs:

Although tuition is exponentially less expensive in Europe than in North America, an exchange to EPFL requires UW students to pay the usual fees. Living costs are more expensive in Lausanne but students who can find reasonably-priced housing and make some minor adjustments to their nutrition regime will find expenses comparable to those in Waterloo. Overseas travel costs vary greatly depending on the time of airplane ticket purchase, route, and destination. Travel CUTS offers good deals for students. Paris is probably the best choice of destination for students traveling to Lausanne. The closest airport to Lausanne is in Geneva but since Paris is a much larger centre, a round trip direct flight to Paris and direct TGV ticket from Paris to Lausanne has fewer hassles and is less expensive than a flight to Geneva with a layover followed by a train ride to Lausanne. A flight from Toronto to Paris can cost less than \$500 before taxes. The TGV ticket from Paris to Lausanne is about 50 Euros (approximately \$80). Academic expenses at EPFL are usually less than at UW. Stationary is more expensive but textbooks cost less and are not required for some courses. Train travel throughout Switzerland and continental Europe is very efficient but can be expensive. Most students purchase a half-fare card, which reduces the prices of all train tickets for travel in Switzerland to half the price and costs CHF 150.-. With the purchase of a half-fare card, a *voie 7* card, which permits free travel between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m., can be bought for CHF 99.-.

IV. Assistance:

Exchange students are invited to attend *la semaine d'immatriculation* and suggested to attend *la journée d'accueil* to familiarize themselves with the campus and see to administrative details. For students who wish to improve their French skills before the start of classes, four-week language courses are offered, and credit can be transferred to UW. The *Service académique* is the best place to go for any scheduling

or registration inquiries. At UW, the exchange coordinator is a good source of information, as well as the exchange website. Resources are good but more work should be done to market exchange opportunities since many students are unaware that they even exist. Students who plan an exchange well in advance are usually notified of admission and residence decisions long before the exchange begins. Telephone calls to Canada are usually very inexpensive. However, the call costs of the telecommunications network should be verified. If they are expensive, long-distance telephone cards are a low-cost alternative and can be purchased at most convenience stores.

V. Evaluation:

Returning to UW after an exchange may require some adjustment but in general, it is not a difficult process. Courses that have prerequisites which are taken while on exchange may require some extra work to cover material that was not taught in the equivalent exchange course. In most cases, students can participate in an exchange and still graduate with their original class. Rarely will anyone who has participated in an exchange say that it was not a worthwhile experience. The extra planning and administrative problems are minute in comparison to everything an exchange has to offer. The opportunity to explore new surroundings, different cultures, and new ways of learning adds a great deal to any engineering program. It is a highly recommended experience.

VI. Health & Insurance

Most students do not encounter any major health or security problems, let alone rely on health insurance at all while on exchange. However, it is important to carry proof of coverage beyond OHIP in order to avoid paying expensive Swiss health insurance fees. Many students are covered by a parent's plan that provides international coverage, such as Great West Life. If not, students can purchase health insurance from any of a number of providers, including UW.