

# A Year in France: UTC 2006

Université de Technologie de Compiègne



A Report Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for GENE 303

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# 1. Introduction

This report documents my exchange experience at the Université de Technologie de Compiègne in France, from January to December 2006. My stay in France included a month-long intensive language program, courses during the spring semester and then a six-month co-op term at a research lab at UTC in the fall.

Compiègne is a small town of about 60,000 people, 40 minutes northeast of Paris. Being so close to Paris, Compiègne is a fairly rich city, and is only one of three municipalities in France to give free city bus service. While it is a fairly small city, it is quite historically significant. The city is known for its Chateau, built and used as Napoleon III's summer residence. Joan of Arc was captured in the large forest outside of the city, and in that same forest the armistice that brought the end of the First World War was signed.

The university itself is an engineering school only and is smaller than the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Waterloo. Most classes take place in one main building near the downtown core while most labs take place in another building a couple kilometers away. Those two buildings make up the bulk of the university – there is no university campus like in Waterloo. The university is actually fairly well known in France and ranks well each year.

Preparing for an exchange can be fairly daunting since the new destination is unknown, as well as the cultures and customs that go along with it. This report is meant to give an overview to the overall exchange experience at UTC and hopefully answer some of the many questions that you might have before deciding to embark on your own exchange.



Main building on the left, library and administrative building on the right

## 2. Getting There

### 2.1 Getting the Visa

Applying for the visa at the French Consulate in Toronto is a fairly nerve-wracking process, though it actually isn't too hard at all. Just make sure you plan enough buffer time before your departure to France, since you can only obtain a visa while you're in Canada.

Follow the directions on the consulate website for students applying for a 2B visa (for "students who wish to complete part of their university curriculum in an institution in the context of an inter-university agreement"): [http://www.consulfrance-toronto.org/article.php3?id\\_article=385](http://www.consulfrance-toronto.org/article.php3?id_article=385).

While the directions are fairly vague, which is enough to make anyone anxious, I found that the people at the consulate just want to make sure that you have all of the required documents. The lady at the consulate didn't thoroughly read any of the papers that I brought, she just checked to make sure everything was there and took a copy of it. They will only deny a visa application if there is a clear violation; the student who went before me was rejected because her passport wasn't valid for the required one year after your expected return. The appointment itself is fairly quick and is similar to standing at a booth with a bank teller.

#### Tips to avoid visa-related hassles

In general, dealing with any kind of administration is a large hassle in France. You will have to deal with many paper forms and a lot of waiting, since everything is done in person and will feel rather slow and inefficient. So, if you are unsure about how long your exchange will last (e.g. if you are considering staying for a second term to work or for a second semester), make sure you apply for your exchange to UTC for the longest duration that you are considering. This will enable you to apply for a visa for this duration (max. 12 months). It is much easier to come home earlier than to have to extend your visa!

Also, a short-stay (6 month) visa cannot be renewed in France – to extend it you have to return home to Canada and apply for a new one. A long-stay visa can be renewed for a maximum stay of 12 months if you applied for a duration longer than 6 months but shorter than 12 months at the outset. However, to extend this visa you will have to jump through all the same hoops (and pay the same fees) as from the original application for a residence permit (forms and medical checkups, etc.) So, if you can avoid it from the beginning, this is recommended!

Another thing to be aware of is that your visa will say "France (+1 transit Schengen)". This means that on your way into France, you are allowed to pass through one other Schengen country (this covers most European countries and a few other ones). This is written on the visa to grant travelers permission to have a flight stopover in a country for which they need a visa, on their journey to France. As Canadian citizens, we don't need this because we do not need a visa to most of these countries. However, some border guards may interpret this statement more

strictly. So, in order to avoid any potential hassle, if you plan on travelling to other countries before entering France, make sure the start date of your visa is actually the day you intend on entering France. Then you will definitely be able to visit any country you wish before the “1 transit Schengen” comes into effect. It seems illogical, but I encountered this issue myself trying to enter Germany, when I told the border guards that my next stop was Italy and not France. I admit that I still don’t fully understand it, but if you have any questions, you can always call the Canadian embassy. I ended up calling the French embassy in Germany, and they seemed to agree with me and suggested that I travel by train instead of plane since there are fewer border checks in case the issue came up again. Ultimately, I’m pretty sure it shouldn’t have happened in the first place, but it has happened to others so it is likely to happen again, unfortunately.

If you are applying for a long-term stay visa, once you get your long-stay visa or the official receipt that you have applied for the visa, make sure you take this with you when you travel. If you don’t have your long-term visa or are travelling on a short-term visa, you still shouldn’t run into any troubles when you travel, but potential is there for border guards to be confused about the Schengen statement. Just know that as a Canadian citizen you are in fact allowed to travel to these countries.

## ***2.2 Other Pre-Departure Information***

The representative from UTC will send you checklists of things you need to do before departure and things to bring to France. They will set you up in residence and tell you when you must arrive in France. You will have to arrive in Compiègne on a weekday during business hours, so that you can check into residence (unless you have made other arrangements). The school may even send a taxi for you and anyone else who arrives at the airport around the same time. You can also take the train.

**TIP:** The checklist tells you to bring a few visa-sized photos of yourself. You will actually need a lot of them. It seems that everything that you sign up for in France requires a photo – I even needed one to register for dance lessons! Most of these photos can be photocopies; only the official papers (for your visa, etc) will need real ones. But taking a lot of pictures (3.5cm x 4.5 cm, black and white with a white background) with you when you leave will save you from using the picture booths in Compiègne (in the train station), which are both expensive and of mediocre quality.

## ***2.3 Money Matters***

The first week that you are in France will be spent doing various administrative tasks. This includes registering for courses, getting your student card and computer account (so you will still have to wait a week before you can access internet) and most importantly, setting up a bank

account. UTC has an agreement with the bank Société Générale, so a bank representative will come to speak to you to explain what information you need to set up a bank account.

You will need:

- proof of identity (your passport)
- proof of residence (you will have to get an “Attestation Domicile” from your residence)
- UTC student card or proof that you’re a registered student (“certificat de scolarité”) – this might not be necessary to open an account but you will need it to take advantage of student incentives

The key thing is that you won’t be able to set up a bank account immediately. Even if you set it up by yourself once you arrive, it will still take a couple days to get your Attestation Domicile. But the fastest way to open an account will be to do it yourself, by bringing your proof of identity and residence to any bank that you wish. Otherwise, if you wait for the bank representative to give you all the necessary details and open your account along with all of the other students, it will take about two weeks. So make sure you will have enough money (cash or internationally accepted debit card) to survive a couple weeks in France without access to a bank. Canadian credit cards will generally be accepted but not everywhere.

I would recommend bringing or having access to a few hundred euros. This will be more than enough to safely cover your initial costs, including bedding and other household items, meal tickets at the university cafeteria, books, groceries, your train discount card and some weekend travelling.



### **3. Living in Compiègne**

The majority of UTC students live in residence. Some students rent rooms or houses to share or even live with a family, but this is less common. Exchange students are placed in a residence by the UTC exchange coordinators. In the past, many exchange students and most UW students have been placed in a residence called Roberval (or “Résidence Universitaire”). A lot of exchange students are placed in Clos de Roses, and a few go to Mare Gaudry. I lived in Clos des Roses. All residences have internet.

#### **3.1 Roberval**

This is the Village 1 of UTC. Of all the residences, this is the cheapest (around 150€), though you get what you pay for. The rooms are the smallest, about 3m x 3m. Washrooms, a stove and a microwave are shared with the floor. One shower is shared between two people (the shower is located between the two rooms). Each room has a small sink and a mini-fridge. Some rooms/showers have mold, though some are clean. There is a common room for the building with a tv and a few common computers. Roberval is about a 5-min walk to the main UTC building.



Roberval Residence

### **3.2 Clos des Roses**

Clos des Roses is a bit like an apartment building. It is actually an HLM – low income housing. While most of the residents are UTC students, there are some families and other non-students in the building.

The Clos des Roses complex is comprised of three different buildings. Within each building, there are three possible living arrangements: studio (single), twin (double) or triple. The studio is an open space (about 19 m<sup>2</sup>) with a bed, desk, kitchen and washroom. It costs in the high-300€ range. The twin (called jumelée) consists of two individual bedrooms and one shared kitchen and bathroom. Each bedroom is around 4m x 4.5m and the doors can be locked. The kitchen consists of 2 stove burners, a sink and a mini-fridge. The rent is in the low-200€ range. The triple rooms are typically given to three students from the same school. There is one small room and one larger room, so at least two people will have to share a bedroom. There is also a kitchen and bathroom shared between the three residents. I think the rent is just less than 200€ per person.



One of the buildings in the Clos des Roses Complex (view from my room)

The location of Clos des Roses borders on the “ghetto” part of town. It is farther away from the main building of UTC – about a 10 minute walk. There are a lot of low income apartments around and a few shady characters. There have been reports of car burnings and theft



(particularly laptops and cell phones). I never encountered any incidents myself, but as a rule of thumb it's not advised to walk home alone late at night. There are usually other exchange students to walk home from parties with. My bike was stolen though (in front of the Mare Gaudry residence), which is apparently a very common phenomenon in Compiègne.

In general, I enjoyed my stay at the Clos des Roses and have nothing against it. The room was spacious, clean and I liked the suite-style living. There are a lot of students around and while there can be shady characters, as long as you're smart about it you should be okay.

### **3.3 Mare Gaudry**

This is the nicest residence of the three, and the priciest. It's in a quieter part of town, a little farther away from UTC than Roberval, but a little closer than Clos des Roses. It is also suite-style living. I don't know too much about this residence but from what I have seen, the rooms are large like in Clos des Roses and the kitchen is big. You also have the highest chance of having French roommates in this residence.



One of the buildings of the Mare Gaudry Complex

### **3.4 Cap'Affaires**

This is where a number of the students stay during the Cours Intensif, in February or August when the residences aren't open or the previous students haven't moved out yet. The apartment suites open concept and geared towards families. There is an upper level that makes up the main bedroom, with a double bed in it. The washroom, kitchen, kitchen table, tv and couch/bed are on the main level. There is also another mattress for the third person to sleep on. It is suitable for the month-long language course, but not more than that. There isn't enough desk/table space for three people to do homework and nobody gets any privacy. This is not a feasible living arrangement for three people during a regular semester. The cost was about 200€/person/month.

Initially, because our applications were handed in late, the spaces allocated for exchange students in the other residences were already full and we were told that we had to stay at Cap'Affaires. However once we arrived in France we were able to find room in the Clos des Roses building by visiting the administrative ladies in the Clos des Roses office – they were able to help us right away.

### **3.5 Caisse d'Allocations Familiales**

This is a housing subsidy that is valid for anyone with a residence permit in France (it might even apply to the short-stay 6-month visas but I'm not sure). You will probably receive around 40€/month (it is proportional to how much rent you pay), but they will only start paying you once you get your residence permit. They will keep paying you as long as you are living in France and have a valid residence permit. This is another reason why it's easier to apply for the full 12 months for your visa, if there is any likelihood of you staying for a second semester. Renewing your visa will interrupt these payments! You are encouraged to apply for this as soon as possible, since you will have to wait a couple months before you start receiving anything. The administration in Compiègne will remind you of this.

## **4. School**

### **4.1 School System**

The first two years of university at UTC are called the “Tronc Commun” – general foundation courses before the students declare a major, or a “branche”. The types of engineering offered at UTC include: Biological, Chemical, Civil, Computer, Mechanical and Mechanical Systems.

UTC students also have work terms: they do a one-month entry-level placement during their Tronc Commun. After their third year, they have one sixth-month work term, the “stage d’ingénieur”. At the very end of their studies, the last six months comprise the final work term, the “projet fin d’études”.

### **4.2 Classes**

Most French students take 6 or 7 courses (normally 5 technical and 2 electives) but exchange students are recommended to take a maximum of 5 (of which 1 should be a French course). Depending on the courses that you choose, this can make for a very light load, especially since the pace of each class is much slower at UTC than it is in Waterloo.

Lectures are usually two hours long, once a week. They aren’t split over multiple days like at Waterloo and as a result, the pace of the class feels much slower. My profs presented their lectures in powerpoint or overhead format, and none of them wrote formal notes on the board. There are no assigned textbooks or homework, and lecture slides or class notes are made available to the students. In general, the courses seemed to cover the same general concepts as the Waterloo equivalents, but not nearly to the same depth.

The style of marking in France is also quite different. Assignments and tests are designed to be challenging and are graded on a harder scale than in Waterloo. Everything is marked on a 20-point scale and it is next to impossible to achieve a 19 or 20. A 16 is a very good mark and 12-13 is considered average. You will be assigned to a letter grade in the end, to conform to the European credit system. Regardless, as long as you pass the course you will get a “CR” on your transcript.

### **Course Equivalents**

Regarding course equivalents, as a general warning, what you actually take at UTC is very likely to be different from what you planned on taking before you leave, depending on the scheduling of classes and when courses are actually offered. So, take the courses listed on the UW exchange website as a very loose guideline. If you do have to switch classes, be sure to keep in

contact with your department's undergrad advisor to make sure your new course is still appropriate for a UW equivalent. The courses that I took and are described below.

### **BM01 – Introduction to Biomedical Instrumentation**

- Professor: François Langevin
- No direct UW equivalent

I was interested in this course because UW offers very few biomedical-related courses. This was an interesting course, though the prof was not very organized. He knows his stuff but nothing seemed to be planned in advance (we didn't get a syllabus and we only got course notes right before the exam). We ended up covering the physics behind ultrasound, MRI and nuclear medicine. There was a guest speaker on biomedical engineering and one on biochemistry.

There were two visits to the local imaging center, one to see an ultrasound demonstration and another to see an MRI demonstration. Aside from these two visits, there were no labs despite the fact that one was scheduled into my timetable.

### **DI01 – Introduction to Industrial Design**

- Professor: Didier Wallert
- SYDE 361 equivalent

This class was mostly comprised of guest speakers who worked in various areas of industrial design. It also involved a group design project, to redesign various topics that are assigned (oyster knife, wheelbarrow, etc). A report was submitted as a group and then individually, each student submits a poster outlining their design. The course load was very light. No prototyping was involved (this is done in DI03 for those who are interested).

### **LA94 – French as a Second Language, level 4**

- Professor: Frédéric Pugnère-Saavedra
- FR 362 equivalent, as determined by the UW French Department (though I think this is a little generous)

There are only four levels of French. Level 3 focuses on a lot of grammar, whereas level 4 assumes you know all the fundamental grammar and works primarily on writing and oral discussion. This class was not very structured; Frederic can spend a lot of time talking about current events and politics.

There is a mandatory language lab component to this class, where you spend one hour per week listening to a segment of radio and transcribing it. Since the labs are not separated by class level, this lab can be a bit slow at times.

#### **PS04 – Thermodynamics**

- Professor: Daniele Clausse
- SYDE 351 equivalent

This course is part of the Tronc Commun, so approximately 2B level. The course does not go into as much depth or specifics as the UW course. Instead, as with many courses in France, the course was very theoretical.

There are 4 labs in total, plus a lab practical exam (where you redo one of the experiments encountered in one of the four labs). Each lab is pretty long and is difficult to complete in the four hours given. It is done in pairs, and usually each person will have to work on a different experiment to get everything done in time. It can be fairly intense since the lab reports (handwritten) are also due at the end of the lab time.

#### **SY04 – Linear Control Systems**

- Professor: Christine Prelle
- SYDE 352 equivalent

As a side note, this is a 3B core course while I was in Compiègne for 3A. It is generally frowned upon to take core courses from upcoming terms – it may have been a better idea to take a general technical elective. However, this course was great and was one of my favourites.

The first half of this course was a review of Signals and Systems – the controls part of it really only came in the second half. The professor was very nice, well organized and presented the material well. She was very willing to help and meet with students outside of class.

#### **EI03 – Intercultural Communication**

- Professor: Jacques Pateau
- No direct Waterloo equivalent

This was a great course. The prof is a consultant who specializes in Franco-German relations. Each course was spent talking about a different culture, and guests were often brought in. It is a very interactive class with role-playing games and group discussions. There were about 17 different nationalities in my class.

The biggest drawback of this course is that it is offered approximately every other Saturday morning. It's hard to give up weekend travelling for this course, but if you don't plan on travelling a lot or spend two semesters in Compiègne, I very highly recommend this course. I took this class during my second semester in Compiègne, while I was doing my co-op term. However, since I had to return to Canada in December I was unable to stay until the end of the term. The fall offering of this course includes a week-long session after exams are done in January that is considered mandatory. The spring offering does not have this week-long session.

### **The other 3A core courses**

It was hard to find and schedule all 5 SYDE 3A core courses. The ones I didn't take and how I made them up are summarized below.

3A Core	UW Equivalent
SYDE 331 – Engineering Economics	MSCI 261 – this is exactly the same course and offered every term so it is very easy to make up
SYDE 311 – Engineering Optimization	MSCI 331 – offered every Winter
SYDE 351 – Systems Models 1	There are many possibilities, including SYDE 551, SYDE 454, SYDE 554 or ECE 484.
Work term report	You still have to submit a hard copy of your work term report with the rest of your class! It is much easier to write it and hand it in before you leave.

### **TD – Travaux Dirigés**

This is the equivalent of a tutorial, only these are actually useful. Some sessions are even run by the profs themselves. The person leading the tutorial hands out questions, gives you time to solve them, and then takes them up. These two hours per week are the only chance you get to do some practice problems, since there is no assigned homework.



## **TP – Travaux Pratiques**

These are the labs, usually held alternate weeks (week A or week B). My lab experiences in Thermodynamics and in Control Systems were quite similar. They were each four hours long. The lab requirements were laid out ahead of time so we could prepare in advance, which was generally quite necessary. The labs were long and always difficult to finish within the time allotted. The biggest contrast with labs at Waterloo was that the lab reports were due at the end of the lab period. The reports were typically handwritten and quite rushed, but this also meant that after the lab was done, there was no additional homework to submit!

## **Exams**

The exam period is one week long. With most students taking up to 7 courses, it is quite common for local students to write multiple exams on one day. As a result, the entire exam attitude is quite different from the Waterloo mentality. Exams are typically open book or you are allowed a cheat sheet.

## **Transcripts**

UTC should send your official transcripts to the University of Waterloo soon after the semester ends. You will also receive a smaller version at your house. This will then start the process of turning those courses into credits on your Waterloo transcript.

For those interested in going to grad school, you should be prepared to ask for copies of your transcript, as schools generally require transcripts from all universities attended. However, a transcript from exchange may not necessarily fall into this category. For example, NSERC and OGS applications need only your Waterloo transcript, as long as the credits for the courses taken on exchange appear on the transcript (and as long as you don't list your exchange university in their education sections). The marks for these courses do not count in calculating your average marks for the scholarships, but they do figure into the course count (i.e. if OGS averages your last 20 courses, and 5 of them were taken on exchange, then the marks for the other 15 courses will be used to calculate your average).

Regarding grad school applications, the same general logic might apply – the Waterloo transcript alone might be sufficient. But it's best to check with each university to ensure that you know what they want.

### **4.3 Student Life**

It's fairly quiet at night and on the weekends in Compiègne, though you can always find students in the university bar, the Picolo, as well as other bars and parties around the city.

Exchange students are very well looked after by the student club Esperanto, which devotes itself to entertaining international students. During the intensive language program, Esperanto members toured us around the city and organized a couple nighttime events as well. During the term, they paired us up with a local student. Every Tuesday night there was a party at the university bar celebrating a different country with food and music from that country. There are also two big trips organized during the term. In 2006 Esperanto organized trip to the Castles of the Loire Valley, the World War II beaches in Normandy, Mont St. Michel and St. Malo, as well as the Christmas Markets in Strasbourg.



Es

Esperanto trip to the Chateaux de la Loire

## 5. The Co-op System

In France, all engineering students are required to do work placements. Therefore, all of the engineering schools should have resources of some sort to help students look for jobs (though this would typically take the form of lists of potential employers). UTC is the only French school where co-op placements are part of the exchange agreement with Waterloo – as a result, we get to use their Jobmine system.

### 5.1 Finding a Job

UTC's Jobmine equivalent is called Demeter, though calling it an equivalent is a bit of a stretch. It is more of an online compilation of job postings, like monster.fr. Even then, you only have access to the postings for your "branche".

**TIP:** If you are planning on finding a work term, make sure you register in the branche that most closely fits the type of work that you want! As a systems student, I had initially registered under GSM because I thought it was the closest department. However, being more interested in the biomedical-related jobs, I had to switch to GB part way through the semester in order to access the GB jobs on Demeter.

The way that you apply to jobs will change from branche to branche, depending on the system set in place by the person in charge, the "responsable de stage". In general, you will apply directly to the company. You might use Demeter to make a note of which job you have applied to.

Informatics and mechanical jobs are the most common, especially quality-type jobs. Biological/biomedical and chemical jobs are pretty hard to find. As a result, in GB, the "responsable" was fairly picky – she would screen the applicants herself and then send off the documents of three students to the company. She was also fairly reluctant to help me in any way – she was stressed by the low placement rates of the UTC students and felt that the exchange students weren't helping this problem. Most students had to rely on their own initiative to find their placements.

There is also a "responsable de stage" specifically for all exchange students. She is very helpful for cover letters and resumes and sends out relevant job postings by email. Some companies specifically request foreign students (e.g. some companies have partnerships in Brazil, Korea or Germany). In the end, I found a job by asking my professors.

All jobs in France pay much less than our co-op terms here. An average salary would be about 700€/month. They can go up to 900€ and as low as 300€.

## **5.2 The Coop Experience**

If you do a coop term through UTC, you have to conform to their requirements. This means the term itself has to be at least 22 weeks. At the end of the term, you have to submit a report and give a poster presentation to your supervisor and another prof, who will be assigned to you. Both are in French and the report and the presentation summarize your work over the term. The report requirements are, unfortunately, quite different from the requirements for a UW work term report.

I ended up working for my biomedical professor, François Langevin. He's the director of the little research lab at the Centre d'Imagerie Médicale Avancée, located at the Hospital of Compiègne. The entire research team consisted of myself, two PhD students and two masters students. The research centers on MRI imaging. Each PhD student was working on a different project, and my job was to help out a student studying blood flow in the carotid artery.

It was an interesting experience. This research lab was quite small, limited in financial resources and isolated from other university researchers, since the lab is located inside the hospital. One upside though, is that the hospital cafeteria (which was for employees only) was heavily subsidized and pretty good in quality – 2.20€ would buy a quality lunch!

One thing to be careful of is that since the co-op term has to be 22 weeks long, I had to start working in July so that I could finish in December to return to Canada. My professor was kind enough to let me start that early, especially since he and most of the lab was away on holidays for the summer. It was a very quiet two months, with me and only a few students left in the lab and I had no real tasks to perform during this time.

All in all, it was a great experience and added a whole new dimension to the exchange experience. I would recommend trying to find a co-op term in France.

## 6. Travelling

One of the best parts of going on exchange is all the travelling you can do!

### 6.1 Transportation

The transportation systems in Europe are incredible. It is very easy to get from one place to another without a car.

#### Air

Between Paris' 2 main airports and the one in nearby Beauvais, you can find a discount air carrier to fly you wherever you may want to go. Common airlines include EasyJet and RyanAir, though both are based out of the UK. There are no French discount airlines that I could find, but other countries like Germany, Italy and Norway also have a number of discount airlines. A handy website that searches a large number of these companies is [www.skyscanner.net](http://www.skyscanner.net).

#### Rail

A must for any student is the Carte 12-25 for the SNCF rail system. It costs about 50€, and you need to bring id and a photo of yourself when you buy it. It is valid for one year, for all students between 12 and 25 years of age. On all of the SNCF trains (so the high-speed trains are not included), you get 25% off regular price during peak travelling times, such as Friday nights and Sunday nights, and 50% off at all other times.

High-speed trains such as the TGV and Thalys can be pricey, but there are always a certain number of seats at cheaper price levels, so if you book at least a few weeks in advance you can get some reasonable prices. There are also various promotions throughout the year (i.e. 25€ one-way to any German, Belgian or Dutch stop along the Thalys rail line) that you can find out about from the train websites or via their email newsletters.

If you plan on making a number of long trips, a rail pass may be useful, though you have to buy the pass before you leave for Europe. However, simply booking these tickets well in advance can end up being cheaper.

#### Bus

The city buses in Compiègne are free. For most trips, walking or a bike will suffice but the buses are quite useful to get to the big shopping complex with Carrefour and other big-box

stores. The buses do stop running quite early though, around 8 pm at the mall – don't get stranded!

There are inter-city buses that depart from the train station parking lot as well. These buses go to neighbouring towns, including Pierrefonds (where a really nice castle is located), as well as the airport. I never figured out the schedule of these buses and there is nobody inside the train station that can help. But the buses do exist.

## **Allotic**

This is a great and little-known service that you can use to visit the small villages surrounding Compiègne for 1.50€ each way. It is a program subsidized by the city that allows you to make trips between set stop locations. You phone the Allotic service at least a day in advance, specify the start and end stop and the time that you would like, and then a taxi will meet you the next day. Often times, you will share the taxi with other people. Visiting surrounding towns using the regular taxi service can easily cost upwards of 20€. Visit the Compiègne city website or <http://www.agglo-compiegne.fr/viepratique/allotic.php> for more information.

## **Taxi**

Taxis are typically quite expensive. A taxi to the airport can cost around 100€. The main taxi depot is in the parking lot of the train station – you will often see the taxi phone booth ringing and the taxi drivers coming out of the train station café to answer a call. I didn't use the taxis often but it appeared that if you call for a taxi, they will start charging you once they leave the train station parking lot, before they pick you up! If you split the cost between a few people though it becomes more reasonable.

## **Bike**

A bike is very convenient to have. Not only does it make for faster travel within the city but it also allows you to explore the surrounding areas, especially the forest of Compiègne. You can also bike through the forest (about 15 km) to see the castle at Pierrefonds.

Do be wary of bike theft, which is quite common all around Compiègne. Buy a heavy duty bike lock (or two or three) and try to park your bike inside overnight.

There is a club on campus that will sell you a used bike and buy it back from you at the end of the term. This will occur on specific days near the beginning of the semester.



## **Metro**

In Paris, the subway system is quite extensive. A handy tip for day-trippers under 26 years of age is to get the “Ticket Jeune”, typically for 3 zones. It’s worth it if you take 3 or more subway trips, which isn’t hard in such a large city! Get 5 zones if you’re going out to Versailles, the airport, EuroDisney or some other far-off location. I believe the cost of a 5-zone Ticket Jeune is actually less than the cost of a one-way ticket to Charles de Gaulle airport, since the one-way tickets are for tourists.

## **6.2 Accommodation**

While travelling around Europe, living in hostels is very common. I had a Hostelling International card but did not use it very often - most of my hostels were booked off hostelling websites such as hostelworld.com. However, the variation that you can get from these is quite large – sometimes the hostel will be great and sometimes it can be quite dirty. It is quite hit or miss.

A consistently clean place to stay is any of the Accor hotel chains. The cheapest are the Formule 1 hotels, followed by the Etap hotels. Both consist of one double bed plus a bunk bed, so you can easily sleep three people. Depending on the level of front desk security, you can sneak in more people too. The Formule 1 hotels typically cost around 30-40€/room/night. There is a sink in the room and there are public washrooms to share with the floor. The Etap hotels cost in the 50-60€/room/night range and there is a washroom and shower in your room. The Formule 1 hotels are typically far from the city centers and can be hard to get to with public transportation. Etap hotels can be found in more central locations.

The Apart’City chain is also decent – the Cap’Affaires residence is a part of this chain. The rooms typically cost around 80€ per night (there is usually a cheaper weekly or monthly rate) and can typically accommodate 3 or 4 people. You are also provided with cable tv and a furnished kitchen. Apartments that are part of this chain are all over France.

## **6.3 Festivals and Other Travelling Highlights**

Since Compiègne is so close to Paris, it makes it easy to get anywhere, even if it’s just for a weekend. And in May, almost all the weekends are long weekends due to some holiday or another. There are also week-long holidays in October and April. There are many festivals and places to visit, whether you want to stay close to Compiègne or travel farther away.

## Paris

You can visit this city again and again and still find new things to see and do! Besides the main tourist attractions, some additional suggestions are:

- Bastille Day – this is the most incredible parade and celebration I have ever seen – it seems the entire French army came out to march down the Champs Elysées! Get there very early for a good viewing spot. There are other free events throughout the day and it's worth staying for the fireworks at the Eiffel Tower at night.
- Remembrance Day – the big celebration in France occurs at the Arc de Triomphe, and the President typically makes an appearance. There is also a celebration in Compiègne (see below).
- Free Museum Sundays – on the first Sunday of each month, a number of museums all over France (including the Louvre, the Musée d'Orsay and the Rodin Museum) have free admission. Lineups can be long. The Louvre is also open free of charge to students under 26 from 6-9:45pm on Fridays – the museum is quite nice and empty at this time.
- Opéra de Paris Pleins Feux – you can get free tickets to see a sneak preview of one the Opéra de Paris' operas or ballets. But you have to order them the day they become available, because the tickets are quite popular. Search on <http://www.operadeparis.fr/> for tickets.
- “Soldes” in February and August – these are the big shopping sales that happen twice a year, and the only time besides Christmas shopping season that stores are allowed to open on Sundays!

### Remembrance Day: Clarière de l'Armistice

About 7km from the Compiègne, in the forest, you will find the clearing where the armistice to end World War I was signed. There is a replica of the train car where the signing took place, along with various other monuments. This is also a nice place to visit for Remembrance Day and there is a nice ceremony as well (but it is generally not advertised widely).



Ceremony at the Clarière de l'Armistice

## **Journees Europeens de la Patrimoine**

This is a Europe-wide event where specific buildings, such as the French Parliament in Paris, the European Parliament in Brussels and the International Criminal Court in The Hague are open to the public. The Thalys rail line also gives discounts at this time to facilitate travel to these venues. Check <http://www.journeesdupatrimoine.culture.fr/> for more information.

## **Cycling Races**

The most famous of course is the Tour de France (three weeks in July). It's fun to make a stop in one of the cities to soak up the racing excitement. The first day of racing is called the prologue and involves a very short, individual time trial around a city (it was Strasbourg in 2006). It is a good event to go to because you get many opportunities to see the cyclists, which is better than seeing an entire group of cyclists race by in a blur. The race always ends in Paris, so that would also be very exciting to attend!



A cyclist racing in the Tour de France prologue

Another cycling event is the Paris-Roubaix one-day cycling race. While it's called "Paris-Roubaix", the race actually starts in Compiègne. It's known to be one of the toughest one day races in France. If you're in Compiègne that Saturday (typically in April), it's worth seeing, especially since it's right in Compiègne!

### **Christmas Markets in Strasbourg**

A big thing in France is the Christmas market. All cities, even Compiègne have them, but the biggest one is in Strasbourg. The market consists of little vendors selling Christmas toys or edible treats and is very pretty with all the Christmas lights and decorations.



Christmas market stalls in Strasbourg

## **Chocolate Festivals**

One chocolate festival that I would highly recommend is the Choco-Late Festival in Bruges, Belgium in April. 2006 was the first year that it was run and it was simply amazing. The entire town was transformed for the festival, with various events happening all over the town. There were many free samples to be tasted, as well as incredible chocolate displays and an educational history of Chocolate! See <http://www.choco-late.be/eng/home.htm> for details.





Chocolate Festival in Bruges

Later in the year there was another chocolate festival in Paris, the Salon du Chocolat. It was held in a big convention hall and consisted mainly of vendors trying to sell their chocolate items. One highlight was the dresses made of chocolate, but in general, the one in Belgium was more entertaining, less commercial and much more worth visiting.

### **Sporting Events**

Aside from cycling, there are many other sporting events to attend in France, especially in Paris. There's a lot of soccer and rugby, as well as track and field in the summer and a bit of skating in the winter. I attended a Grand Prix figure skating event, the Trophée Eric Bompard. You can probably find anything you're interested in.



## Various Other Travels

I was also able to do a fair amount of travelling around France and to Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Norway, Belgium and Switzerland. All of the countries have their own cultural flair and there are so many amazing places to visit!



European Commission in Brussels

## 7. Conclusion

An exchange is definitely an experience of a lifetime – you get the opportunity to live as a carefree student in a foreign country! Living in a new culture and meeting many other students from different countries and backgrounds is very enriching and eye-opening to say the least. Whether you decide to go to UTC, France, or some other country altogether, the experience will undoubtedly be amazing and leave you with memories for a lifetime. Any student that you talk to who has gone on exchange will agree that it's worth doing. It doesn't matter where you go – as long as you go!

I hope that you have found this information useful for planning your own exchange. If you ever have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me: [kygkan@engmail](mailto:kygkan@engmail) or [kygkan@gmail.com](mailto:kygkan@gmail.com).



## Appendix A: Four Simple Steps to Planning an International Exchange

Iron Warrior Article Submission, Winter 2007

As any past exchange student will tell you, one of the best ways to spend 3A or 3B is to be far, far away from Waterloo. The Engineering Exchange Program coordinates agreements with more than 40 universities around the world – all over Europe, Asia, Australia, Mexico and more. You can make up your regular course load while absorbing the culture, history and language (if it's not English) of a foreign country. You can fit in lots of travelling (just think: weekend trips to London or Paris!) and then, when you come back to Waterloo, you'll be back on stream with your class.

So what do you need to do to turn such an international adventure into a reality? Almost everything that you need can be found online at [www.eng.uwaterloo.ca/~exchange](http://www.eng.uwaterloo.ca/~exchange). But in a nutshell, here are the general steps that you need to take:

Pick where you want to go. Or at least narrow it down a little. There are so many options, this is probably the hardest step!

Talk to the Exchange Coordinator responsible for the university/country you're interested in. He or she can give you more information about the university and will ultimately approve you to go. Some programs (specifically Sweden and Australia) are very popular, so it is best to meet the coordinator as soon as you can.

Fill out the application form. This is a very simple form that is signed by your department's Undergraduate Advisor, co-op director and PDEng director. Getting approval shouldn't be difficult; these are just in place to make sure that you will still be able to graduate on time.

Bring all your documents to Cindy Howe in the Exchange Office. She will get the final signature from the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies and can answer any questions you have.

That's it! Now, there are a few requirements that you have to meet. You have to be a Canadian citizen (i.e. have a Canadian passport) with a cumulative average of at least 70%. You should plan your exchange at least 8 months in advance, and set it for 3A or 3B (depending on your department, it may be possible to go for 4A). If the language of study is other than English, you should have at least basic communication abilities. The official requirement is grade 12 + 1 university course or 3 university courses without any prior background, though these usually aren't strict rules. Of course, the more of the language you know, the better.

For more information, check out the Exchange Program website, [www.eng.uwaterloo.ca/~exchange](http://www.eng.uwaterloo.ca/~exchange) where you can find lists of universities, program coordinators,

previous students and the courses they took, as well as all the necessary forms (including forms for scholarships). In the Exchange Office (CPH 1320), you can find reports of past student's experiences, as well as Cindy, the friendly administrative coordinator who can help you with almost anything.

So for all you first and second years, I encourage you to consider going on exchange. It is a truly incredible experience that will leave you with friends from all over the world and memories for a lifetime.

## **Appendix B: Life as an Exchange Student**

Iron Warrior Article Submission, Spring 2006

New cultures, new experiences and memories for a lifetime - that's how I'd characterize an exchange abroad. Born and raised in Kitchener, I wanted to try something different for a term, go somewhere (anywhere!) less familiar than Waterloo. After considering everything from Germany to Australia to Hong Kong, I finally settled on the Université de Technologie de Compiègne (UTC), in France.

My reasons for choosing UTC were mostly academic – there are biomedical courses here that UW doesn't offer – though I soon realized that course material is only a small fraction of the overall exchange experience. In a different education system and a foreign language, the mentality of an exchange student is entirely different from that of a local student. Exchange students are generally encouraged to take a lighter course load, plus our grades are transferred back to Waterloo as a simple pass or fail.

Outside of class hours, beyond the time spent translating French to English and trying to understand what actually happened during the lecture, I had ample opportunity to just enjoy being in a new culture, interacting with French, Brazilian, American and German students, as well as travelling through Europe and seeing the sights.

Of course, my classes were an experience in themselves. At UTC, profs don't use textbooks. Half of my profs distributed course notes; the other half simply came to class and talked for two hours. Homework was rarely assigned and any practice problems were done during tutorials, which were also led by the prof. Labs were four hours long, done with a partner, and reports were due at the end of the session.

So, while I will be returning to Canada with five course equivalents, I will be taking home so much more. The sense of accomplishment in finishing a thermodynamics lab when, at the beginning of the term, I hardly understood what was being asked. The thrill of watching the World Cup final on the streets of Berlin, cheering on the Tour de France cyclists as they ride by, and soaking up the Olympic atmosphere in Turin. The memories of eating chocolate in Belgium, gelato in Italy and salmon in Norway.

All past exchange students that I have ever met have said that an exchange term abroad is an opportunity not to be missed, and I wholeheartedly agree. It doesn't matter where you go, but if you can, go!