

Report Form Exchange Period Abroad 2016-2017

Foreign university: University of Le Havre

Country: France

Courses completed at the host university:

1. Droit constitutionnel I + TD (7 ECTS)
2. Droit des affaires (4 ECTS)
3. Droit du travail (4 ECTS)
4. Propriété Intellectuelle (4 ECTS)
5. Droit civil anglais (English civil law : Law of property) (3 ECTS)
6. Droit civil anglais (English civil law : law of tort) (3 ECTS)
7. Droit civil anglais : cas pratique (2 ECTS)
8. Droit civil anglais : langue orale spécialisée (2 ECTS)
9. British political institutions (3 ECTS)

Study Programme

The study programme is very relaxed, it is possible to choose any courses you want, ranging from bachelors to masters (Bac + 1 – Bac + 5). It is also possible to choose law courses from other faculties if needed. For example if you have a problem with your timetable and courses clashing, you can check if the course is available in another faculty. However, there are only a few law courses in the other faculties and they tend to be business law or commercial law.

Also, it is important to make a long list of courses you are interested in because the timetable isn't given until after the semester starts and since you have to take many courses, you will probably have to change some of your courses due to timetable clashes. I had to change half of my courses because they were at the same time and the credits ended up being different for some courses. There are usually less lectures for master courses and the master courses tend to be more interesting, for example les libertés fondamentales, la protection européenne des droits de l'homme, and régimes matrimoniaux, so that may be preferable. I would strongly not advise you to take droit des sûretés (third year course) because that is one of the hardest law courses and almost impossible to pass.

For the exams, don't leave studying to the last minute because the exams are all squashed into two weeks so you will definitely have at least 3 exams in one week and you may even have more than one in a day. Also, although on the timetable it says there is a week off for revision, this week was used up by teachers who kept cancelling their lectures and wanted to make up their classes, so we actually did not have any time before the exams to study.

There is also the possibility to take courses in English, which helps a lot because the French courses are quite tough and due to the small number of ECTS you have to take several courses. The English courses usually deal with British or American law. I took British political institutions, English civil law: law of tort and law of property. British political institutions is very interesting and the professor is really nice and likes international students. Law of tort is British law and the cases are also very interesting, while law of property is mostly based on American law. Usually in law of property, the students have to follow the course 'Droit civil anglais: cas pratique and langue orale spécialisée'.

These two extra courses are not obligatory for exchange students; however they are very useful because they are organised like working groups so you learn more about law of tort and property and they are easy to pass.

In terms of the French courses, 'propriété intellectuelle' was the only master course I took. Although the course material is very interesting, the professor reads straight from the book so the lectures were extremely boring and I found it very hard to understand him, but for that you can ask a student for their notes. 'Droit des affaires' and 'droit du travail' were alright and the teachers were nice. However, droit du travail has a very large course content, the notes my friend lent me from the lectures were 100 pages long; also it is an oral exam and the teacher asks a lot of very specific questions from the whole course. 'Droit constitutionnel I' was my hardest course, although it was the only first year course I took, because it was worth 7 ECTS and had a TD (TD is a working group). I would advise taking as little courses with TDs as possible or none at all because they are a lot of work and the courses have 3 exams, some of which involve writing a 'dissertation' which is a standard French essay with a strict format. I took the course because I really needed the credits and the teacher was really nice and willing to help.

It is important to know that there are no powerpoints for any of the courses and many courses are three hours long with maybe a 5 – 10 minute break or two in between. The English civil law courses however were 5 hours long because the cas pratique and the langue orale spécialisée started immediately after the main lectures, but the teacher gives long breaks and the cas pratique is mainly presentations so we often finished early.

Language and language preparation

I studied French for about 6 years in high school, though most of the French I learnt before coming to France was in Groningen. I took a minor in French at the faculty of arts for two years to reach B2 level. This course is mostly for IRIO and European languages and culture students, and is a lot harder than the language course at the language centre but it's possible to register if they have places left. I also worked as an aupair for a month and a half in Switzerland during the summer before my exchange to practice my French and that helped a lot.

The University of Le Havre organises free language courses for all international students called FLE (Français Langue Etrangère). They have a week of intensive French courses before the start of the semester and after that 3 hours of courses during the week. You can choose the level you want, from beginner to superior. Most international students were reluctant to try the superior class but I would advise it because you learn a lot more since the students are allowed to choose the topics for discussion and it is really not that hard. I would definitely recommend these courses because they help a lot and they're fun, plus it is a great way to meet international students; I met all my international friends through these courses. You can obtain 5 ECTS for these courses but the law faculty in Groningen doesn't recognise credits obtained from language courses.

Although I already had a basis in French before coming here, there are many students who didn't speak a word of French and who chose to study in English (they also took beginner French courses). Furthermore, most international students speak English better than they speak French, although I did have friends who didn't speak English. However, if you want to improve your French, I would advise insisting on speaking French to everyone because that's the most effective way to improve;

you also learn a lot of French from going to lectures. It may be a little hard at the beginning to get used to speaking French and tempting to switch to English, but it definitely gets easier after a month and the French are very accommodating and encouraging in terms of the language.

Finances and general matters

In terms of finances, expenses are roughly the same as in Groningen. Le Havre is not a big city so you won't be spending much. Although the university residences are close to the university (5-10 minutes' walk), you can get a pass for the public transport for €26 a month. You will probably only need to use the tram, that is around €1.80 for an hour or €4 per day. You can also rent a bike for free for 5-6 months at the town hall, but you should do that quickly because there is a long waiting list. If you want to practice sports, they have an association called SUAPS, but unlike Groningen and other French universities, you have to register per sport and pay for any sport you want to practise. The prices differ per sport but for an indication, I did salsa and ballroom dancing and that was €60 for the year. You also have to pay to enter all the clubs, that's about €10 per club. Housing is slightly cheaper than Groningen, about €370 for a studio and about €280 for a room with shared facilities and you can apply for a grant from the government. You need to take out insurance too (assurance habitation, assurance responsabilité civile and assurance de rapatriement) which together will be between €50 and €100 for the year, but the university will explain that to you. If you are not European, you also need health insurance.

I didn't really keep track of my expenses but you should be fine with about €600 – €700 a month including the rent.

Preparation and contact with the faculty abroad

Before leaving there was a lot of contact with the international office and law secretary at the host university (although none with the lecturers). Mostly this was because there were so many documents to be filled out and I needed the course descriptions of all the courses for the Board of Examiners to approve them and none of the course descriptions were on the website. As soon as you know you have been accepted at your host university, you should request the course descriptions because they take forever to reply and you need to have these before the academic year in France ends (May/June) because after that the professors will not be available to write them up. I couldn't have my learning agreement signed before my exchange because of this problem.

There is not a lot of information on the website but the university will send you a welcome pack with all the information and all the documents you need to submit and you can call them if you are in doubt. There is also a mentor system, so you will be assigned a mentor (usually a third year or master student who has studied abroad and speaks at least English) who will explain things to you and help you both before and after your arrival. Your mentor will also pick you up from the station, take you to your room and help you open a bank account.

The French students are nice when you talk to them and if you need notes for the courses they will be willing to send them to you, which really helps because they literally write down every word the teacher says, so the notes tend to be very detailed. There was not much contact with the French students during the lectures because there were so many people and it was hard to socialise, but in the English courses, working groups and master courses it was easier to talk to the French students

because the groups were smaller. I was the only exchange student in all my law courses except in two courses, so most of my friends were international students from my residence. However, I did speak to a few people in my courses and we hung out once in a while outside class.

Housing

Everybody says it is important to have housing sorted as soon as possible in France because it's hard to find a place and you have to sort out the CAF. However, for me it was very easy because the university proposed a room for me so I did not have to go through the trouble of finding one. However, they offered me the room in mid-July, which is really late, so if you are scared you will not like the room you can start looking for a room earlier. I was lucky because the room they offered me was an 18m² studio with my own bathroom and kitchen, was two minutes walking from the university and only cost €370 a month. Note that although 18m² sounds big, it's actually quite small because the bathroom takes up 5m², but it was a very modern building.

As the university has a partnership with the national student residence association (CROUS) the university usually offers rooms in their student residences. You can go onto the website (www.crous-rouen.fr) to look at the rooms if you want an idea of what the rooms look like and where they are located. It offers residences for students all over France so you have to go to the Rouen-Le Havre section. They have different residences all over Le Havre, most are close to the university, the farthest is St Nicholas by the Docks and about a 15-20 minute walk, but it's a very nice residence, it also has 18m² studios. A downside to these rooms however is the amount of paperwork you have to do. You will be asked for a guarantor (someone you know working in Europe and earning at least €2,000 a month). If you don't have a guarantor, you can apply for the 'clé', but they will explain to you how that works. You will also have to submit your ID, bank details, French university student card, a statement and payslip from your guarantor and other documents. It's a very chaotic process but once you accept the room you will be guaranteed that room even if it takes you while to sort out all the documents. All the rooms are furnished, you only have to bring your kitchen stuff and bedding.

You can also find a room with a private landlord if you do not want to live in a student house or go through all the paperwork. For that you can look on sites such as www.appartager.fr and www.leboncoin.fr.

Once you have a room, you can apply for the CAF. The university will help you out with that. Basically it is a grant from the government to help cover the costs of your housing. You can apply as soon as you have your housing contract signed, are registered at the university and have a French bank account. You start to receive money for the month following the month you applied so you should apply as soon as possible, and you will receive about 30% of your rent. For this you will probably need a birth certificate translated into French, although some of my friends used their original birth certificates in English and they were accepted.

Guidance and reception at the host university

When you arrive, you have to go to the international office (SRI) for the pre-registration. Then you will be given a second date for the main registration, which will be at La maison d'étudiant. The international office also organises integration activities for students. It is important to go to the FLE

language courses in the first week because during these courses they show all international students around Le Havre, give tips for travelling and explain some things about the university. There is also a facebook group where the international office announces upcoming activities in Le Havre.

If you need any help with anything, you can always go to the international office during their office hours. If it is course specific, you can go to the law secretariat, they are always willing to help. I would advise you to also search for and join all the law facebook groups because the students post important updates about the courses.

Other (tips, suggestions, comments, opinions, etc.)

When coming to Le Havre the best way to get there is from Paris. You can fly to Paris and get a bus from Paris to Le Havre for €9 with flixbus, ouibus or isilines. The connection between Le Havre and Paris is very good so you can go to Paris for a weekend or during the holidays as it is only two hours away and there is a lot to see. You can of course visit the big cities of France like Toulouse, Lyon, Strasbourg, Bordeaux etc, but if you're not doing anything for a weekend, you should also spend a day each to visit Etretat, Caen, Rouen, Honfleur and Deville. These are all towns in Normandy near Le Havre that are worth seeing. There is also a beach in Le Havre so you can go in September while it is still sunny.

During the semester, we have one week holiday in October-November and two weeks in December. All exams will be in the last week of December before holidays and the first week of January after holidays, but if you have a course with a TD, you will have two extra exams for that course in October/November, depending on whether they decide to place it before or after the holiday. If you will be in Le Havre for the second semester, there is a one week holiday in February and the exams are in April (resits in June). Note that you have to take all the courses at the same time because the semester is not split up into block 1 and block 2, and since most courses are 3 - 4 ECTS, you will have a lot of courses and so will be in class about 25-30 hours a week. Sometimes there are also classes on Saturday.

When you open a bank account, most students do it at the bank Société Generale because it is free the first year for students and they offer cheaper housing insurance (assurance habitation and responsabilité civile). If you want to use another company for insurance or need health insurance, you can try SMENO, that's also good for students.

Although there is a lot of administration to do and it might seem very chaotic at the beginning, it calms down after a month. You will meet some lovely people in Le Havre. I liked my Erasmus experience because of all the wonderful people I met and hope to stay in contact with, plus I found it very beneficial for my language.